

# creating a place: women, land and improvisation

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'andrea breen', followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that extends to the right.

## **Abstract**

Being a woman-in-the-world is a cacophony of experiences in which place and improvised events ceaselessly vibrate. For artists this resonance can be consciously generative or circulate at a deeper layer of creativity. At whatever level they voice their presence, sense of place and improvisatory practice are in constant process of becoming. In this interdisciplinary thesis I seek to present a more enriched way of being-in-the-world for women through presenting sonorities of emplacement and improvisatory practice as rhizomes of transformation.

The intertext of the biophysical world is infused with phenomena which parallel improvisatory events, and so in the first 'sounding' the concept of place is explored by way of 'outside' space and its common referents 'nature', 'landscape' and 'wilderness'. These terms have been feminized in the traditions of Western representation and I attempt to recuperate them through a sense of the feminine that comes from attunement rather than from objectification.

Improvisation for women is fraught with 'garrison' rules that almost preclude participation. I argue in the second 'sounding' that non-idiomatic improvisation may offer a non-gendered space in which women improvisers can voice their desires without the constrictions of masculinist models of desire and closure.

An important facet of this process has been interviews with non-indigenous women composers who use improvisatory gestures and

'land' resonances in their compositions. Drawing on interviews with Miriam Hyde, Ros Bandt, Hazel Smith, Anne Boyd and Moya Henderson, I propose that diversity and multiplicity in women's serious art-music in Australia are often expressed through improvisatory gesture or in a subtext of improvisatory intentions through which signifiers of openness and interrelatedness are sounded.

My own journey has been a cyclical process of displacement and emplacement. By way of improvisatory practice I have been able to express that process in my compositions. In the final 'sounding' I describe the process of making the two recordings included with this thesis: the sound installations for the collaborative women's exhibition *Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue*, and the CD *improvisation-image-voice*, a collection of improvisations to the readings of four Tasmanian women poets who respond to sense of place. As creativity for me has incorporated performance, I conclude with reflections on performances with the poet Sue Moss that grew from the recording process.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Stewart Gordon Breen (4.6.23 - 29.4.76), truck-driver, shop-assistant, preacher and gardener, who gave me the fun of word-play and said, often, and with typical optimism, 'reach for the sky; there's only dirt under your feet'.

andrea breen



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## creating a place: women, land and improvisation

*'I seems more vulnerable and so is more in keeping with how I feel in the bush. I work alone in the orchard and I walk alone in the bush. I am temporary here and vulnerable and in this must only speak for myself* (Elizabeth Jolley from 'The Goose Path' in R. McDonald (ed) 1990: 11).

### introduction

Lived experience of place and the improvisatory impulse are concepts so integrated with life force that their presence and intersection are rarely contemplated. But how do the connections actually work and more particularly through what process do they work, for women? These questions have set me on a course of exploration risking a product that could either be slipped into the margins of madness and nonsense or considered a contribution to feminist aesthetics.

As I believe that the process of discovery is as important as the finds themselves, I have reflected on my own process and relational world as a researcher and improviser-composer while presenting a critique on the contributing research. Self-reflexivity is pivotal to a phenomenological perspective that argues for being-in-the-world as the process of co-creativity.

I propose that artistic responses to participation with the natural world<sup>1</sup> are improvisatory impulses, mirroring nature's implicit reciprocity and non-dichotomous being. This 'space between' is one of

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<sup>1</sup>My use of the word 'natural' is as a specifically 'biophysical' concept.

depth and diversity that signifies interrelatedness and openness, qualities that could be interpreted as resonators to being-a-woman. As an immersion in women's experience of place, poetry, and improvisatory impulses in musical composition, this thesis enacts the process of sounding those depths and multiplicities.

## research methodology and background

Does a dissertation based on binarisms created by a historiography of patriarchal codes free the participant to be exploratory and yet still meet the standards set by the genre? That is, can women interleave self-reflexivity, creative work and research for a product that, through its interdisciplinarity, voices eclecticism? I have answered 'yes' to both these questions and have layered literary and musicological research, events, poems, creative work, critical inquiry and ecological concerns. The result might be called a *palimpsest* (layers = space) or a *periplus* (journey = time ) or something moving between: *palim-plus*.

In my search for a 'between' model I have been enabled by poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches to blend, reshape, cut, paste and subvert generic traditions. Postmodernism is a slippery concept and it is its resistance to meaning that not only reflects what it embraces but that also allows the artist and consumer of art to explore between spaces and trifle with reductive meaning. As musicologist Lawrence Kramer says, 'the term postmodernism...is at the centre of a momentous intellectual debate', making definition beyond reach. Kramer, taking from Jean-François Lyotard, says that the term

*designates a conceptual order in which grand schemes of explanation have lost their place and in which the traditional bases of rational understanding - unity, coherence, generality, totality, structure - have lost their authority if not their pertinence....Postmodernist strategies of understanding are incorrigibly interdisciplinary and irreducibly plural...[It is] not a system but an ethos (1995: 5).*

The implicit plurality and interdisciplinarity of the concept allows for play and so in this thesis I take postmodernism to mean a break with and subversion of conventions of power (which, despite the advent of 'new' forms, became 'traditions' with modernism) in literature and art (Abrams, 1988: 110). While postmodern forms may often, at face value, seem to signify meaninglessness in the grand scheme, they can act as tools for playful questioning that re-construct and recreate while they de-construct. It is re-creation through play (improvisation) that enthalls me most.

In taking a poststructuralist approach (that could be called postmodern in broad terms), I engage with linguistic concepts and structures but let 'the meaning of any text remain "open" to contradictory [or ambiguous] readings' (Abrams 1988: 203). This approach is particularly valid for a thesis that comes under the broad category of 'women's studies', an interdisciplinary domain that attempts to define new languages and reinvent established disciplines to include diversity and difference.<sup>2</sup> A poststructuralist approach is appropriate to this thesis because I broach several disciplines, engage with my own process (which is always fluid), and attempt to say new things about women and creativity.

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<sup>2</sup>See Susan Sheridan's 'From Margins to Mainstream' in Sneja Gunew 1991:70.

While searching for models without (and between) traditional disciplines, I was helped by the leading example of the School of Social Ecology (now Inquiry) at the University of Western Sydney where students are encouraged to intersect the arts with scientific inquiry and to reflect on their process and relational world while building a critique of their research.<sup>3</sup> I was attracted to this method of analysis at the outset of my journey when I was experiencing dissatisfaction with rigid approaches and casting about for interdisciplinary research models. At around the same time I undertook training in Experiential Creative Arts Therapy<sup>4</sup> and learned to apply existential-phenomenological concepts in the therapeutic context. This training, which I applied to my work as a musician with dementia patients as well as to improvisatory composition and performance, enabled me to conceptualise creativity and research as process: a process that I am attempting to write about in postmodern terms.

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Woog, Head of the School of Social Ecology, University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury), says: 'There is intentionality in Social Ecology. The intention is the improvement of the Socio/Eco condition through critical discourse and collaboration...Social Ecology is post-modern, moving away from authoritarian systems of power...and from a dependence on positivism and rational thought as the only source of knowledge. Social Ecologists are concerned with the appreciation of difference...as part of a process through which knowledge is constructed, and with...subsequent actions' ('Occasional Papers' #1, 1995: 1,2,4).

John Cameron observes that Social Ecology is a 'synthesis between process and outcome...between personal and cultural contexts...between the constructed and the natural environments...and between theory and practice. [It is] participative and collaborative, emancipatory and empowering, valuing of diversity and ecological in the wider sense of the word (implying that all participants and the situation they are researching are interconnected in a living system in ways that are not obvious)...It is whole person learning' ('Occasional Papers' # 1, 1995: 25) (Woog and Cameron's theoretical support is taken from Reusch and Bateson 1944, Lewin 1948, Habermas 1972, 1974 and Lyotard 1979).

<sup>4</sup>Melbourne Institute of Experiential and Creative Arts Therapy (director Warren Lett). This training breaks with conservative traditions of psychology by offering multi-modal methods and, as it is based in phenomenology, provides a practical training in that field of knowledge as well as a deeper understanding of its themes. This school adds 'intersubjectivity' to what would otherwise be a too subjective, and, arguably, overly academic, discipline. Intersubjectivity brings the dialogue between researcher and client onto level ground where a flow of dialogue and experiencing can take place, leading to deeper meaning through and in expression. In this system, there is not the need to analyze every image that presents itself in art, dreams, dialogue or fantasies (as in psychoanalysis), nor is there an expectation of quantitative data (as in clinical psychology). Emphasis is on process-of-healing rather than on heralded final outcomes, and, as I attempt to show through engagement with my own process in this thesis, improvisation can signify a way-of-being which respects process.

what is process?

Process description bridges the gap between fixed discourses and experiential meanings. Phenomenologists tell us that the interpretational process, through which we bestow meaning, is indivisible from the reality being perceived, and so for each of us, reality is the process. While culture can conflate interpretations through socio-cultural variables, meaning remains open to a multiplicity of interpretations and is never closed. Phenomenologists deny the possibility of 'correct' interpretations and suggest that although we share similar interpretations of reality-in-the-world, 'our interpretations of the world...are not only unique, they are also unfixed ("plastic") in their meaning' (Ernesto Spinelli 1989: 9). The self-construct, within this existential-phenomenological approach, is a being-in-the-world for whom all experiences are relational.<sup>5</sup>

Crucial in the relational sphere is 'I' and the world, a fluid connection experienced as emplacement. Emplacement shares with improvisation relational elements critiqued by the philosophical strand from which I adopt the strategies needed for my ecofeminist aesthetics.

Phenomenology provides a descriptive language for the intersecting preoccupations of this thesis: spirituality, semiotics, deep ecology, ecofeminism and improvisation.

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<sup>5</sup>Ernesto Spinelli has suggested that three central relational foci are implicit to being-in-the-world: 'self-self, self-other and self-with-other'. (From a workshop entitled 'An Exploration of the Therapeutic Relationship from an Existential Perspective' at the *National Psychotherapy Conference*, Melbourne, July 2-4, 1999).

The sense of circularity between the 'lived body'<sup>6</sup> and object, which Maurice Merleau-Ponty articulates, has provided a base for description of emplacement and the improvisatory impulse, one that honours both the relational dimension between subject and object, and also openness to meaning in that amoebic space. I do not however critique the extensive and shifting field of phenomenology but predicate the thesis on its premises of corporeality, subjectivity-objectivity, mind-body, wholeness, intentionality, perception, responsibility, freedom, meaninglessness (that is, open-to-meaning) and expression of process through self-reflexivity.<sup>7</sup>

## feminism, women's writing and 'new' writing

This thesis is a phenomenological sounding presupposing that the body and experience of subjectivity are unitary and that the body's lived experience of the world *is* experience. I write as a woman, with all the experience and knowledge acculturation and biology bring. This is not suggesting an essentialism based on universal or biological characteristics, but rather recognising that lived experience for most

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<sup>6</sup>As Merleau-Ponty, rephrased by Madison, says: 'the body is in the first instance a lived body...and the experience of our body calls into question the traditional distinctions of object and subject. The phenomenal body initiates "a kind of reflection":...at one moment it is a subject, existing for itself, at another an object, existing in itself...This power that the lived body has of doubling back on itself is the source from which creative and symbolic expression will spring forth' (Madison 1981: 22-25).

<sup>7</sup>My research base in phenomenology includes the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ecofeminist Carol Bigwood, and Gaston Bachelard; process-subjectivity theory is drawn from the school of existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, particularly Ernesto Spinelli, and the hermeneutic-phenomenological literary theory from Paul Ricoeur. See for example: C. Moustakas 1985 *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage; A. Giorgi 1987 *Phenomenological and Psychological Research*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press; E. T. Gendlin 1978 *Focusing*. New York: Bantam; M. Betensky 1995 *What Do you See?* *Phenomenology of Therapeutic Art Expression*. London: J. Kingsley; G. B. Madison 1981 *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*. Athens: Ohio University Press; M. Merleau-Ponty 1974 *Phenomenology, Language and Sociology: Selected Essays of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, (John O'Neill ed), London: Heinemann.

women is not as it is for men. I do not pretend that I have conclusive answers to this difficult philosophical concept but offer an extended dialogue on my experience and understanding of it as a dimension of the process of being-in-the-world as a woman. As 'Androgyny' theorist Carolyn Heilbrun puts it in *Writing a Woman's Life*:

*...we women have lived too much with closure: "If he notices me, if I marry him, if I get into college, if I get this work accepted, if I get that job" - there always seems to loom the possibility of something being over, settled, sweeping clear the way for contentment. This is the delusion of a passive life. When the hope for closure is abandoned, when there is an end to fantasy, adventure for women will begin (1988:130).<sup>8</sup>*

This thesis represents an emerging life where closure is mostly behind me as once- wife, student, heterosexual woman, as I manoeuvre towards the final third of an active life and a completed dissertation: an *opening*, 'a possibility for a meaningful life'.<sup>9</sup> As I write from this changing self-construct, I have a choice: to take risks, move into the 'space between' and open out, or, to stand where there is nothing: nothing but the echoes of a language that do not harmonise with being-woman.

Writing about the lived experience of the risks, and pleasures, of improvisatory practice and participation with place peels layers from

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<sup>8</sup>'Androgyny' is a space that 'circumvents literary patterns of dominance and submission associated with rigid gender paradigms'. Androgyny theory suggests that 'sex roles are societal constructs that can be abandoned' (see Maggie Humm, 1994: 127; see also Carolyn Heilbrun, 1973 *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny*. New York: Harper Colophon).

<sup>9</sup>As Madison observes in *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*: 'The subject of perception is not the free subject, the master of itself which realizes itself to be a unique individual. It is not quite yet 'the most irreplaceable of beings,' according to the expression of André Gide. It is only an opening, a possibility for a meaningful life. It is a subject without personal identity which lives outside of itself and which loses track of itself in the perceived spectacle. My existence as perceiving consciousness is closely tied up with my existence as a body, and consciousness and body are but two sides or aspects of a certain presence to the world' (1981: 26).



the experience of being-in-the-world while opening these experiences to inquiry and expression. As ecofeminist Carol Bigwood observes:

*[the] phenomenological method emerged from a concern for the dominance of the pure sciences, whose description of existence is so distant from lived experience [and so] [t]he methods of phenomenology can be useful for feminists...because this school is not analytic in its approach but descriptive. It attempts to describe how things appear to us rather than attempting to analyse them from a supposedly objective standpoint (1991: 7).*

Women have long felt disabled by the inaccessibility and dominance of scientific inquiry which has not made space for the diversity or difference of their approaches nor for their relational concerns as beings-in-the-world. The rift between the body and the mind, between the spiritual realm and science and between nature and the urge to discover and claim, and, ironically, the assumption that 'sameness' is the key to understanding the human condition, are all implicit to empirical and Empire-building imperatives. These beliefs are manifestations of the duality that continues to make lived experience, difference, desire and co-creativity difficult to authenticate for women through the awareness and description of process. Working with qualitative description can be a holistic and authentic undertaking because it bridges the gulf between these binaries and because it esteems experience, uniqueness, relationality and process rather than sameness, exception, measurement and data.<sup>10</sup> Qualitative description demonstrates that being-in-the-world is not a series of isolated events but a resonator to many factors.

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<sup>10</sup>In existential-phenomenological terms, 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' signify our capacity to be-in-the-world as true selves ('authentic') or as selves driven by cultural expectations and beliefs ('inauthentic'). The 'authentic' has no end-point, is based on individuality and freedom and has (possible) infinite potentialities. The 'inauthentic' is a reduction to meaning that is fixed and closed, limiting our potentialities (and diversity). As

## being-in-the-world

Being-in-the-world is for me a cacophony<sup>11</sup> of lived experiences in moment and place - the discipline of reading and writing, preparing lectures and teaching, providing music therapy for dementia sufferers, caring for and counselling teenage children, gardening, composing, composting, playing Bach, improvising, feeding grey thrushes at the window, and creating collaboratively. I participate too in a paradigm about which I am deeply ambivalent: this PhD project which I acknowledge as bringing together discourses that strain against the existing institutional boundaries of academic disciplines. As an expression of the cacophony, this thesis enacts my deep conviction of the need to push towards a fairer world where gender, colour, creed and nation all have their songs heard, even though the necessity of my living reality so often seems to deny that conviction.

But how to move from the personal process of being-in-the-world to a process directed beyond my own experience? If women only write from experience, we perpetuate the patriarchal notions of 'soppy' women's writing and *do* run the risk of *enclosing* ourselves within biological essentialism. On the other hand, simply to appropriate

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beings each of us demonstrate these propensities to a greater or lesser degree. Engagement with process (through self-reflexivity) validates, I would argue, the 'authentic' self whereas writing a thesis like this for examination may well be motivated, in part, by the 'inauthentic'. Spinelli, to whom I owe this explanation, has cautioned that it is naive to generalise a theory which subdivides human beings into 'types'. For the sake of an argument for qualitative and descriptive process however, they are useful terms (1998: 109).

<sup>11</sup>Although the dictionary meaning of 'cacophony' is 'discordant sound', my use of the term here is as a metaphor for interactivity, an acoustic world where some sounds and events merge in harmony while others fracture and repel each other only to mutate in another variation. At any level of tonal or atonal conjunction, the interactivity is relational, changeable, and diverse.

'malestream' writing is to negate our self-knowledge and our relational world and to continue to endorse, albeit often unhappily and unwittingly, patriarchal reality. One of the most difficult and risky tasks undertaken in this thesis has been to find a balance between voicing women's experience and theorising the process of that voicing without kowtowing to male theorists.<sup>12</sup>

Is it possible though to appropriate without capitulating? And does it matter? Toril Moi observes:

*Given the feminist insistence on the dominant and all-pervasive nature of patriarchal power so far in history, feminists have to be pluralists: there is no pure feminist space from which we can speak. All ideas, including feminist ones, are in this sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology...The point is not the origins of an idea (no provenance is pure), but the use to which it is put and the effects it can produce (1997: 105).*

The space from which to voice our selves and find new meaning, while not 'pure feminist space' is the 'between' space in which to re-create and co-create ourselves and our art. Women need to articulate their own territories within, without and between theoretical terms. Elizabeth Grosz describes theoretical discourses as a '*hommosexual*' circuit, 'for and between men' and argues that it is time to turn our attention 'to the development of very different models by which to experiment with...and understand desire not in terms of what is missing or absent, nor in terms of a depth, latency, or interiority but in terms of surfaces and intensities' (1995: 179). In the 'between'

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<sup>12</sup>Linda Kauffman suggests that to totally reject theory (as feminist Jane Tompkins for example encourages us to do in 'Me and My Shadow' 1987, in Warhol & Herndl (eds) 1997: 1103) and only write from experience 'discourages investigation of any complicating factors that may weaken the stance of victimization or moral superiority. This [non-theoretical] strain of feminism...resurrects...Romanticism [where] the criteria of value are sincerity and authenticity, which inevitably lock us back into the very dichotomies (male intellect versus female intuition; head versus body) that so many other feminists have spent so much time trying to dismantle' (Kauffmann in Warhol & Herndl (eds) 1997: 1162).

space, improvisation - the force of positivity charged with intensities and surfaces - can, I believe, take place. Here there is room for the sacred, as it is a space where 'I' and outside space - the world of nature - can interact, replicating the intensity of personal encounter that is aleatory, inventive, open and inter-connected.

The thesis then is shaped as a journey towards this space and self-reflexivity within it. As a completed project it is an enactment of this space. This journey is a process of becoming,<sup>13</sup> what I will call the *habitus*,<sup>14</sup> the spatio-temporal territory-in-process where emplacement and improvisation meet and mutate<sup>15</sup> in co-creativity. Here then is the shape of *palim-plus* to come.

## sounding 1

### female figuring in nature

In the first sounding I look to phenomenology as a way of understanding outside space and its feminization, with the assistance of theorists such as Edward Relph, Gaston Bachelard and Maurice

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<sup>13</sup>'Becoming', or 'the force of thinking while doing' as Elizabeth Grosz explains it, is borrowed from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Grosz 1995: 127). In Deleuzian terms, 'becoming-woman, becoming-bird and the becoming-sound of music' are signifiers for the flow of semiotic chains which are at once 'perceptive, mimetic, gestural and cognitive' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). 'Refrain', 'deterritorialisation', 'rhizome' and 'nomadology' are terms that they use to explore the moving shape of thoughts (texts). As Grosz says: 'They [thoughts] only remain effective and alive if they have effects, produce realignments, shake things up' (Grosz 1995: 127).

<sup>14</sup>*Habitus* is a concept Pierre Bourdieu uses to describe the circularity of past and present through corporeality. He suggests that 'the *habitus* - embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active present of the whole past of which it is a product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present' (*The Logic of Practice* 1990: 56).

<sup>15</sup>Mutate has a musical meaning as well as one that denotes metamorphosis.

In musical terms mutation applies to non-octave harmonics that are sounded by a 'mutation stop' played on the organ, producing 'new colours'. Mutation is also an early musical term for modulation from one hexachord (scale of six notes) to another that overlaps with it (see Percy Scholes 1977: 742;468).

Merleau-Ponty and voices from within feminism and ecofeminism. I begin by uncovering meanings for place and space before moving on to the terms 'nature', 'landscape' and 'wilderness', common markers of outside space. The notion of a 'liminal' space - a place which is not confined/defined by essentialist notions of gender but one that is fluid, relational and constantly negotiable - is central to my developing thesis.

Land-as-sacred for Indigenous peoples is, to quote Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs (1998), 'all over the place'. By contrast, the traditional and recently revamped 'desert' theory of white-men's spirituality, based on Judeo-Christian metaphors, is not necessarily appropriate to non-indigenous women's spiritual needs nor to their sense of place. It is also not representative of women's experience in the world which is often far removed from desert spaces and rehearsed tropes of penetration into those spaces. I argue that 'emplacement' - a deep sense of belonging - can be experienced as a resonance, a sense of being anywhere, taking its tenor from the Indigenous sense of 'indwelling' in place (all over) without pretending to an appropriation of Indigenous 'indwelling' of the land. For non-indigenous women like myself, a sense of place and sacred space builds on relationality, openness and a resonance to place as space that is, like the natural world, always in process.

## sounding 2

### improvisation, a way of being t/here

In the second sounding, I chart improvisation as a musical metaphor and as an intuitive impulse common to the apprehension of all phenomena. This part unpacks Bailey's definitions of idiomatic and non-idiomatic modes and argues that non-idiomatic modes, which may sift idiomatic gestures in the creative process, can give women improvisers a becoming space in which to voice their relational world, openness to meaning and sense of place.

## sounding 3

### composing women in (their) place

(cassette #1)

The third sounding presents musical compositions which resonate with place and demonstrate that interrelatedness and non-closure are generative, particularly for women composers. Australian music, like poetry, has long echoed the spirit of the land, the clearest example being Aboriginal musics where the sonic forms are often experienced as the land itself. Non-indigenous musicians too have composed and improvised musics which reflect significant exchange between the self and the natural world.

Calling on field work interviews and research, I discuss the compositions of Miriam Hyde, Ros Bandt, Anne Boyd, Hazel Smith and Moya Henderson. In diverse forms, these artists reveal, by way of resonance to place and improvisatory gesture, openness to meaning

and a sense of interconnection with the natural world, place,  
their own experience and the human condition.

sounding 4

sonic explorations: recordings and exegesis

\* *Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue:*

*Sonic Arc and Head Piece* (cassette #2)

\* *improvisation-image-voice* (CD #3)

\* performance: bringing out the sounds of private soundings (cassette #4)

\* *Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue* (cassette #2):

side 1 *Sonic Arc*

side 2 *Head Piece*

The first recording is drawn from the collaborative exhibition *Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue*. This collaboration, based on travels through inland Australia, resulted in two sound installations which merge text with sound sources: *Sonic Arc* has been taken from the 'one-off' CD which was amplified in gallery space (side 1); and *Head Piece* has been copied from the looped cassette that was positioned in the gallery as a listening station (side 2).

Accompanying *Sonic Arc* is the one-page score, a map for improvising. It was displayed, in enlarged format in the gallery for the duration of the exhibition and also used as a cover for the cassette

copy of both installations which was made available for purchase during the exhibition.

Included in the appendix are samples from the exhibition, including intertextual 'sites' by the collaborating artists.

I describe the collaborative creative process for *Will the real Australian please stand up...a travelogue* and my part in it as sound artist. The collection of visual and sonic artefacts aimed to confront the participant with the taken-for-granted gaze of touristic experience and with colonial myths of penetrating the land.

\* *improvisation-image-voice*

(CD #3)

The second recording is a CD of Tasmanian women's voices. Four women poets (Gwen Harwood (read by Sue Moss), Margaret Scott, Angela Rockel, Sarah Day) read their poems of place to my improvised viola, violin and voice gestures.

I describe the process of producing an anthology which is eclectic, accessible to an audience and valuing of the diversity of place-poems and improvised-compositions that respond to the sense of place evoked by those poems. The process of making the CD available for sale and broadcast is explored along with my experience of the improvisatory process as 'accompaniment' to written texts.



\* performance: bringing out the sounds of private soundings

(cassette #4)

The third recording is of a live broadcast of a sound-word improvisation with feminist poet Sue Moss for the Australian Broadcasting Commission 'Improvisatory Music Awards' in June 1999.<sup>16</sup> I discuss the process of moving into a freer form of improvisation in which improvisation, in this mode, has been an interchange of text and sound rather than a response by the musician to the readings as exemplified on *improvisation-image-voice*. In experiential and compositional terms, this 'intertext' deepens the dimension of the forming of sounds, words and mutated form in the moment.

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<sup>16</sup>Hereafter the 'Australian Broadcasting Commission' will be condensed to the 'ABC'.

**sounding 1**

**female figuring in nature**

## sounding 1

### female figuring in nature

*...so the writer is [s]he who not only lives as other [wo]men do but who again thematizes this life in order to express it, to reflect it in a work and thereby transform it into truth (Madison, 1981: 128).*

### self-reflexivity

To situate my self as subject in the writing of this *palim-plus*, a postmodern presentation, my lived experience of place and improvisation come together under the globe of self-reflexivity as I search for authenticity. The process of research, creativity and understanding is assembled, shaped and given force through writing.

Self-reflexivity, or 'turning-back on one's self', is central to the phenomenological method:

*...a self-conscious consideration of lifeworld, the taken-for-granted pattern and context of everyday life without having to make it an object of conscious attention. Immersed in their daily world of cares and concerns, people do not normally consider the lifeworld; it is concealed as a phenomenon. The phenomenologist works to unmask the lifeworld's concealment, bringing its aspects and qualities to scholarly attention (David Seamon 1980: 169).*

Postmodern writing, by breaking open closed form, can, in phenomenological terms, 'release time from form and being from Being and thus activate the being of the reader [and writer] as being-

in-the-world' (William Spanos in K. M. Newton 1988: 197). But how to begin this self-reflexive and scholarly journey?

The context for my writing is the phenomena of my lifeworld and past associations. A sense of place is a shaping force in the act of articulating thought and life-as-process. My self-construct comes from knowing who and what I am, so that intentions and identity are given form by experience of place and its corporeal memories.

As I sit at my desk writing, rain beats on the window, the shrike-thrush sings for tidbits at the open door and cobwebs crowd the window frame. I recall houses I have lived in, other cities and regions. Present experience of place is a chorus of past associations circulating within the present. This *habitus* is expressed perfectly by Bachelard:

*If we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out the shadow. We do nothing to reorganise it; with intimacy it recovers its entity, in the mellowness and imprecision of the inner life (1994: 57).*

In 'The Gateway' by Judith Wright, the struggle towards self-knowing is the way through which she meets home. The roundness of being-in-the-world is a deep identification with the lived experience in time and imagined time, place and dream-place. Whether a day-dream or an existential reflection on the moment of death through the landscape of the mind, the poem reaches for the truth of existence in the intimacy of belonging in place.

Through the gateway of the dead  
 (the traveller is speaking)  
 I kept my pride.  
 Stepping between those awful pillars  
 I knew that I myself  
 had imagined, acted,  
 and foreseen everything as it was here.

In the land of oblivion  
 among black-mouthed ghosts  
 I knew my Self  
 the sole reality.  
 But this was not permitted;  
 the way went farther.  
 Stepping down  
 by the shadows of the river,  
 even that river  
 (soundless, invisible)  
 vanished; and the path dissolved,  
 and I, upon it.  
 Self, my justification,  
 sole lover, sole companion,  
 slipped from my side.

To say that I recall that time,  
 that country,  
 would be a lie; time was not,  
 and I nowhere.  
 Yet two things remain-  
 one was the last surrender,  
 the other the last peace.  
 In the depth of nothing  
 I met my home.

All ended there;  
 yet all began.  
 All sank in dissolution  
 and rose renewed.

And the bright smoke  
 out of the pit of chaos  
 is the flowing and furious world.

And the mind's nightmare  
 is the world's sweet wellspring  
 (the traveller said). (Collected Poems 1985: 116)

## knowing place

In phenomenological terms, any awareness of place comes from lived experience, from relations between the body - with its spectrum of experiential apprehensions - and the location of that experiencing. Through lived experience of place our 'immediate experience of the world is filled with meaning....Foundations of geographical knowledge lie in the direct experiences and consciousness we have of the world we live in' (Edward Relph 1976: 2). Such a phenomenological view is predicated on the possibility of a pre-knowledge, a reserve of embodied memories, that informs our experience and through which we map for ourselves our sense of landscape, place and awareness of spatial referents. The inner and outer landscapes mutate in an amoebic space of knowledge and experience, past and present.

A phenomenological perspective on place, Seamon writes, 'avoids Cartesian dualism<sup>1</sup> by arguing that there are other modes of consciousness and intentionality besides the cognitive mind, including bodily modes' (1980: 171). Object and subject reciprocate, making a trans-mutation. It is this new space that is crucial to being-in-the-world for women and to a feminist aesthetic that is concerned with addressing the paradigm of Otherness that has made ecofeminism, feminism and postcolonialism necessary.

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<sup>1</sup>Perhaps unfairly, given the diversity of his writings, philosopher René Descartes has become synonymous with and representative of the positivistic mindset which is the foundation of the 'enlightened' cultures of the West and North. Ecofeminists and phenomenologists resist Cartesian philosophy because it privileges mind over matter, male over female, empirical investigation over intuition. For the Enlightenment philosophers '[t]he whole notion of nature as compounded of irreducibly different qualities and unbridgeable 'natural' kinds, was to be finally discarded. The Aristotelian category of final cause - the explanation of phenomena in terms of the "natural" tendency of every object to fulfill its own inner purpose - ...was abandoned as unscientific...and literally unintelligible' (Isaiah Berlin 1956: 17).

Humanist geographers, who as a broadly categorised group include ecofeminists and eco-architects, have been influenced by phenomenologists attempting to describe the spatial experience of intimacy. The discourse of traditional geography reads place through cartographic acts and representations rather than from the relationship between body and space. In the emerging geography of the 1960s and 70s, reciprocity is given credence so that 'places are acknowledged as complex integrations of nature and culture...[that] are not just the [where] of somewhere...[but] the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon' (Lukerman quoted in Relph 1976: 3). However Lukerman's definition does not clarify the multiplicity of meanings for terms like 'place', 'region', 'area' and 'location', and Relph, addressing this complexity, suggests that this confusion results from a 'naive and variable expression of geographical experience'. Traditional geography has presupposed direct experience, or 'place as a multifaceted phenomenon of experience' (1976: 29) and yet mapping and indeed all geographical representation can only exist because of intentions, choices and knowledges in and of places. Relph attempts to reclaim this fundamental awareness when he says:

*...geographical space is not uniform and homogeneous but has its own name and is directly experienced as something substantial or comforting or perhaps menacing. It is the space of earth and rock, water or air, the built space of towns and villages, or landscapes expressing entire complexes of human intentions...[such that] geography...is a profound and immediate experience of the world that is filled with meaning and as such is the very basis of human existence (1976: 5).*

Phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty writes that the existential world 'precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract sign language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is' (quoted in Relph 1976: 6). Scientific abstraction of places ignores the entire range of experience through which we all apprehend space.

The signifier 'place', like 'improvisation' that I uncover later in this thesis, has many faces. These terms share an existential tension of meaning that is deeply connected to the self-construct's lived experience over time. The shifting interpretations have occurred because there is such a diversity of lived experience of these phenomena and because the past spatio-temporal experiences continue to be reinvented in the present as they 'become' something new. What these ways-of-being share, to use Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's formulation, is the 'territory...as a place of passage', or the 'process of passing into something else' (1987: 323). The phenomenological task, as Seamon writes, is to 'unmask the lifeworld's concealment' of this process.

## space for place

If place then is the mental mapping<sup>2</sup> of past experiences into a present sense of belonging or 'emplacement', what is 'space' in which

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<sup>2</sup>'Mental map' is a psycho-geographical term used to describe the intensification of mental images in the process of making place from space (W. G. Moore *Dictionary of Geographical Terms* 1963). As each place is constructed in the mind upon memories of experience-of-place, mental mapping must be a corporeal process: a *habitus* of emplacement.



place performs an intimate, phenomenological and existential function in the process of becoming self?

The meaning and nature of space continues to be contested by theorists, from many discourses.<sup>3</sup> As an experiential territory space can be characterised as the intangible and nebulous zone in which we move without reflection until we chart it to specificity. Space provides a context for place and takes its meaning and potential meaning from identified place-constructs. Place then is the relationship of self to space, context turned into territory. 'We move through space; we stop in and are directly involved with places' (Tamara Winikoff 1995: 8). 'Placemaking', is the skill of turning public spaces, those spaces that are non-specific and often objectified - like the skyline - with little meaning other than domination by multi-national corporations, into places where people share experiences and deepen their sense of that place and their bodies in space. 'Sense of place' or 'spirit of place' is the phenomenon of deep knowing, even if that sense is 'short term' experiencing, as in a park - public space - that has been shaped to communal function rather than to 'site'.<sup>4</sup> Relph describes the process of identifying with place as one of

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<sup>3</sup>The dialogue on the nature of space continues with poststructuralists, feminists and postcolonialists and is still an unresolved one, demonstrating the elemental nature of space in experience, whether intrasubjective or intersubjective. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests in her introduction to *Space, Time and Perversion*, this debate 'focuses on the possibility of forging a non-hierarchical relation between philosophical theory and the arts (most notably architecture), a relation of mutual enrichment rather than criticism or aesthetic evaluation' (1995: 4).

<sup>4</sup>'Site' has multiple spatial meanings. The *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1987) says: a site is the 'ground on which a town or building stood, stands or is to stand'. In the narrow traditions of geography which map sites by spots, squares and grid markers, site has an architectural ring to it, the kind of architecture that is utilised public-space rather than belonging-place; it also has a touristic resonance: sites are reserved for and created by 'the gaze', relying heavily on the discourse of the spectacle. 'The tourist site is...framed for us by...the "marker". Plaques, signposts, maps, commentaries - such phenomena don't just add a secondary comment to the tourist site - they *constitute* the monument, landscape or event as a tourist site' (see 'Natural Histories...' Ruth Barcan 1996: 14).

sacralising space, so that 'the identity of a particular place can persist through many external changes because there is some inner, hidden force - a 'god within' (1976: 30). As Susanne Langer writes, from an architectural perspective,

*...a 'place' articulated by the imprint of human life must seem organic, like a living form, [as a] location in actual space [so that] this kind of place disappears if the house [park, burial ground] is destroyed (quoted in Relph 1976: 30).*

This depth of and potential for affinity with place is what I will call 'emplacement': a sense that comes from an awareness of past resonances that percolate within our present emplacement or displacement. This is the performance of belonging: the *habitus*.

The concept of the *habitus* is one that cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu deploys in multiple ways. It has been appropriated by Michael de Certeau and by feminist theorists and musicologists to assist in the description of the embodiment of experiences over time which then influence performativity.<sup>5</sup> The *habitus* 'is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways'. Explicating further Bourdieu's concepts, John B. Thompson says that these dispositions are

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<sup>5</sup>Feminist theorist Terry Threadgold uses the concept of the *habitus*, alongside Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity' and Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming', to identify the changes that take place in self and self-to-self relations in performance: '...the body remembers, that place/context can produce effects in bodies which seem to be common sense, natural, that the body is also in a sense autonomous from place and context because it exceeds both....Bourdieu recognises that 'acting' involves disciplined assemblages of place, posture and thought which are metaphors for, but not the same as, the *habitus* of social life. This seems to imply that he recognises "acting" as changing the *habitus* ' (see 'Some Reflections on Theory and Performing Metaphors' in Macarthur & Poynton 1999: 65). Sally Macarthur engages with the concept extensively in her exploration of a feminist aesthetic in Australian art-music. For instance, she argues that 'the *habitus* in the field of art music [music education] is collectively orchestrated to maintain and perpetuate this hegemony, leaving little or no room for women's music to make its presence felt' (see 'Performance Rites: AMEB or not to be?' in Macarthur & Poynton 1999: 19; see also Macarthur's PhD thesis entitled 'Feminist Aesthetics in Music: Politics and Practices in Australia', University of Sydney, 1997)

*ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to reflection and modification...the dispositions are generative and transposable in the sense that they are capable of generating a multiplicity of practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired (1991: 13).*

To use music as analogous to the corporeal knowledge of the past: the cacophony of past sounds is recalled and recreated in the present moment through lived experience so that the new sonority is a resonance of all that has been sung before. The body remembers past sounds most acutely when associated with place: 'incorporated history' generates a continuing process of production, re-production and sense of place.

For Bachelard, for whom sonority is a figuration and performance of the deepest experience of belonging by which memory is embodied, space by far outweighs the importance of time in our lives, even though place is contingent on temporality:

*In the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles. At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability - a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when [s]he sets out in search of things past, wants to 'suspend' its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for (1994: 8).*

The 'fixations in the space' become places with naming, with settlement, whether in the deepest sense of knowing and belonging or in the cursory and possessive gaze of imperialistic exploration. Names own and displace tribes in order to establish 'new' territory yet naming is also fundamental to being at home, to where we are and

have been. Naming, as a performance of the linguistic *habitus*,<sup>6</sup> is an utterance that authenticates awareness of place for the body within space.<sup>7</sup>

## naming and framing outside spaces

To name is to give to space a linguistic mark, to embark on an act of territorialisation that in colonial terms is ownership but as a process of belonging is an act of intentionality: we name to become emplaced. Common terms like 'nature', 'landscape' and 'wilderness' are signifiers for the 'countless alveoli' we experience as 'outside' space and while they do not come without imperialistic associations they are more than linguistic constructs: they are contexts for the process of becoming-specificity, for lived experience of emplacement. Space, as 'nature', 'landscape' 'wilderness', refers to 'land', which for my purposes is a meta-sign that includes the biophysical environments of dry land, water and sky. Land and urban space operate as binary oppositions which compete for valency. As non-urban space declines in size and bio-diversity, urban space takes a privileged seat in the hierarchy.

As Arnold Berleant remarks, concepts of non-urban space are all subject to a shifting lucidity:

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<sup>6</sup>The 'linguistic *habitus*' is 'that sub-set of dispositions acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts' (Bourdieu 1991: 17).

<sup>7</sup>In Thea Astley's *A Kindness Cup* the massacre of a group of Aborigines takes place at a sacred site, 'Mandarana', and is figured in European history because an Aboriginal woman, clasping her baby, jumps from the top of the cliff, stopping the hunters in the course of their actions. The event marks the territory, and the site becomes known to the white settlers as 'The Leap'. But for Aboriginal people it has a multi-layered significance, not the least of which is sorrow and dispossession (1984: 63 - 72).

What we mean by nature, our beliefs about wilderness, the recognition of landscape, our very sense of environment have all made an historical appearance and have been understood differently at different times and places. No wonder that an aesthetics that aspires like the sciences to universality has difficulty accommodating nature (1993: 234).

The implicit essentialism in these terms - as feminised spaces - is a legacy of post-Renaissance discourse. They have so much more experiential significance than is presupposed by the 'gaze' and the 'panoptical' language implicit in European hegemonic systems.<sup>8</sup>

## The land outside: nature, landscape and wilderness

The 'outside' world experienced while being-in-the-world is today evoked by three key concepts: 'nature', 'landscape' and 'wilderness'. In preparation for moving towards an ecofeminist perspective, I want to address the key terms contested in debates about the world experienced as 'outside'. I come firstly to nature, because it has become a 'meta-concept' for space that is non-urban or non-biophysical, although historically its meaning has shifted ground with time and association.

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<sup>8</sup>Michel Foucault suggests that the 'gaze' from an elevated platform signifies power of one class over another, as for example in a prison or mental hospital. Simon Ryan argues that the 'gaze' is central to the penetrating purview of European explorers (see Ryan 1996: 133 and Michel Foucault 1979: 201).

nature, a sign of the times.

According to ecofeminist Carol Merchant, nature, throughout ancient and early modern times, referred to 'a dynamic creative and regulatory principle that caused phenomena and their change and development' (1983: xxiii). This pre-Scientific Revolution, metaphysical and phenomenological meaning signified a system where nature was experienced as everything along the continuum of life and death. *Nature was in life and life was in nature*. All lived experience was interpreted within the cycles and rhythms of nature. Nature was a cacophony of interrelated systems.

With the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment came a gradual shift, as the values of the mind, empirical inquiry, scientific discovery and structure took precedence over 'natural' principles and the body, or matter. This dualistic epistemology has persisted through to the modern age but not without resistance in the arts. Artists looked to experience of nature for metaphor and inspiration, even though they were developing highly refined and structured forms that show the pervasive influence of the Enlightenment ethic. The 'dominant paradigm' of Western consciousness at the turn of the Millennium is still inflected with Enlightenment values. The phenomenological interface, the kaleidoscope of change and renewal essential to a life/death continuum, has been blurred by the complexities of modernity. Cacophonous connections exist but as urban dwellers we have become insensitive to the force of their presence.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>'Human creation and nature so interpenetrate in our understanding that they apparently preclude the likelihood of producing clear conceptual distinction. Human beings are a fragment of nature, and nature is a figment of humanity...[N]ature is as much a construct, and natural beauty is as dependent on human perspective, as any landscape painting [so that] nature in

In her overview of Australian 'desert' art, Roslynn Haynes writes of the late twentieth-century 'counter-discourse' that has subverted colonial mapping traditions that are central to post-Enlightenment practices of exploration. In novels such as Patrick White's *Voss* and D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* and emerging through the popularity of Aboriginal 'map-art',<sup>10</sup> there is a 'notion of a complex, multi-layered map that included many facets of experience not defined by measurement' (1999: 248). With this trend to re-present and appreciate creations of outside space that are more than neo-Enlightenment representations, the dualities of mind and matter that have been implicit in post-Enlightenment iconographies are brought under the lens and reinvented in ways that have valency for deeper experiencing.

Postmodern aesthetics recall past associations while reflecting on the present, signifying diversity and interrelatedness so that meaning is always shifting ground like the process of being and the *habitus* that 'process' voices. As musicologist Lawrence Kramer suggests, postmodernist revisions of art disrupt the 'appeal of the autonomous artwork [that] arises amid the social transformations of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'. The grand narrative of design in the modernist project that 'transfer[s] numinous authority from the height of increasingly demystified central institutions to the

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natural beauty operates in association with concepts such as landscape, view and prospect, all of which are already evaluative' (Kemal & Gaskel 1993: 3,4,34).

<sup>10</sup>As Aboriginal painter Emily Kngwarreye's paintings demonstrate, 'the ground' that informed her lived experience, whether as mythology or as place of belonging, was the image that she painted. She had one theme: 'her country' (see Susan McCulloch 'Emily's Country' in *The Australian Magazine*, February 8-9, 1998). 'Map-art' however is a reductive term for these paintings which embody astonishing diversity and relationship with the land.

depth of personal experience', becomes, with postmodern aesthetics, 'the locus of aesthetic autonomy' (1995: 238).

Elucidating on this 'locus', Kramer rejects the polarised Kantian duality of subject/object in favour of a reconciliation of 'law and pleasure', 'registers of subjectivity', and of the 'imaginary/semiotic'. 'The locus of autonomy is the gap in presence, the hyphen in representation, a perceptible-imperceptible fissure that can never be closed without a seam...[or] cinders/trace' (232).

Kramer argues for a postmodern criticism of music that deconstructs formalist constructs, and, reconciles and opens gaps in binarisms that have reduced interpretation through closure. But, to return to Haynes' historiography, art often begins from a postmodern intention, such that the creator invites multiple readings and possibilities, 'traces' of law and pleasure, 'cinders' of the imaginary/semiotic, that take on even more depth and richness of possibility when read with, to adapt a cliché, 'an open mind'. In the recent boom of interest in 'landscape art' and expressions of corporeality, postmodern motives, signified in postructuralist objects, are evident in the diversity of productions and in the plethora of meaning possibilities. Layers of text are juxtaposed with musical fragments, both through-composed and improvised; theatre and dance merge with stand-up comedy, opera and computer graphics; fiction intertwines with non-fiction and poetry; media turns into multi-media; still photographs dialogue with film. Anything (comes and) goes. Meaning is in flux in the locus of autonomy, or, in what I would call, the liminal space.



In the recent performance and recording of Andrée Greenwell and Mary Kathleen Fallon's intertextual collaboration *Laquiem*, sense of place is mapped by morphologies and the body is mapped by experience and emotional memory. The body remembers place through corporeal experiencing. A postmodern production, *Laquiem* maps the process of grieving through exploring the territory of the female voice, the body's instrument of utterance. Fallon's text is playful, witty, sensual, brutal, vulgar and visceral, and the piece is 'inherently theatrical'. '[T]he characters in *Laquiem* learn to live with their sensitivity. It is met, understood, augmented and magnified by them as passion, and friendship forces them to engage with each other's equally gruelling and rigorous sensitivities'.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. *Introducing Kaye Nine*

*I learnt all I know from dirty  
dogs in the back streets of  
my childhood country France.  
Learnt to run with the pack,  
the scent in my nostrils.*

#### 7. *everywherething I touchwalk*

*everywherething I touchwalk  
with feet with hand with eye  
everywhere my mind alights upon  
dissipintergrates under the weight  
desiccates devoid of moisture  
dry as a mummy  
dephlegmation*

*everywherething I lovehaunt  
with hope with hurt with sigh  
everythingwhere where my heart alights upon  
segmenteparates under the weight  
dissemesicrates  
into a sort of hatred*

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<sup>11</sup>From an interview with Gretchen Miller in *Real Time* May 1999: 38.

*dead as a mummy*  
*deseccation*  
*dissipintergrates under the weight*  
*desiccates*  
*This is a body waiting. This body covers*  
*everywherething I touchwalk.*  
 (Kathleen Mary Fallon 1999)<sup>12</sup>

Through the body, which is both mind and matter, we experience the world around us. 'Nature...is a moment in the way we make sense of our being in the world', in space and time (Peter Reason 1994: 78).

landscape, spectacle or refuge?

'Landscape' is often conflated with nature. As a cultural construct, it is the frame through which we read the natural world. As George Seddon has said of these constructs:

*The ways in which we read them, talk about them, perceive them,*  
*work over them, use them, evaluate them functionally,*  
*aesthetically, morally: these are all informed by our culture*  
 (1997: xv).

Landscape is bounded, bracketed off for representation. Aspection - by painting, photograph or view from a window or cliff-top - has become metonymic for landscape.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Text from *Laquiem: Tales from the Mourning of the Lac Women*. Music composed by Andrée Greenwell with text by Kathleen Mary Fallon. Green Room Music Productions/AMC 1999.

<sup>13</sup>Eade suggests that landscape is 'largely an urban-dwellers' projection, reconstituting the countryside out of one's own and other's yearnings'. He believes that every culture has its own projection of the landscape which enfolds 'a feeling for and a response to the terrain that landscape inhabits and shapes' (1987: vii).

Landscape, in its common usage<sup>14</sup> signifies an aesthetic construct, usually with a horizon, in the organic or physical world. For the traditional geographer<sup>15</sup> the landscape is what s/he maps, describes and contains. Mapping is predicated upon a gap between the form of representation and the land it represents. The cartographers' panoramic field re-produces a metaphoric script far removed from the tracks on the ground and the cycles of regeneration and decay. In landscape painting the gap is an inevitable consequence of the viewer's position:

*Whether depicted in paint, or rolled out as a tableau vivant below a scenic overlook, a landscape situates its spectator in an Olympian position, and it rewards its spectator with the pleasures of distance and detachment and the personal inconsequence of all that they survey. Thus, in regarding the landscape as scenery the spectator is transformed into a species of voyeur (Smith in Kemal & Gaskell 1993: 78).*

In Gwen Harwood's poem 'Threshold', landscape as spectacle jostles with the feelings that stem from belonging-in-place. As with so many of her poems, a dichotomy is constructed so that beauty and tragedy, light and dark, are juxtaposed. The significance of belonging-in-place is central to the imagery and tone of the poem, but the tension and intensity between the natural and the cultural are always

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<sup>14</sup> *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* meaning for landscape is 'a picture representing, or actual piece of inland scenery'. In its Anglo Saxon meaning, *landscipe* referred to some unit of area that was a 'natural entity such as the lands of a tribe or feudal lord'. With the Dutch painters (sixteenth century) came a changing cultural awareness that perceived land-parcels as units of 'visual perceptions' or 'a view' (Tuan 1979: v). The word 'landscape' evolved from the old Dutch 'landscap' meaning 'a painting depicting inland'.

<sup>15</sup> Geographers, attempting to make abstract the 'real' picture, have detailed three aesthetic dimensions of landscape: form, (convex shapes: hills, trees etc.), space (concave shapes: valleys, ravines etc.) and time (light, colour and atmosphere). They also recognise three types of landscape: panoramic, feature and enclosed, with three secondary areas of recognition being focal, forest and detailed (Krutilla et al. 1972: 57).

present as a subtext. However, the metaphor of 'threshold' signifies home, a refuge in which participation and responsibility are implicit.

### *Threshold*

*Know that a peaceful harbour  
framed by low hills, a refuge  
that might be glimpsed one moment  
in a happy dream, exists:  
a marina spiky with masts;  
salt glitter, boat brightness rocking  
in grey-green shallows, and gulls  
reading in deeper sea-gleam  
the text of wind and tide.*

*Some genius of earth  
devised this generous place,  
this charm of light compacting  
sea, sky the hills of Bruny,  
the birds with airfilled bones,  
the clouds like ghosts of sails,  
into one form, one presence  
whose guests we are, and welcome...*

*...pause for a moment here.  
These gums that fracture light  
are home to the intricate compound  
eyes of the insect kingdom,  
and birds, whose eyes can read  
the to-us-invisible pattern  
of the polarized sky, are singing  
what is real but still unnamed.  
Our words and thoughts are polished*

*like pebbles ground in the stream  
of time, but here's an enclave,  
land held in arms of water,  
where the plover and their young  
are safe in feathery grasses  
stirred by the seawind breathing  
a prayer of peace and healing  
in the pure, authentic speech  
that earth alone can teach.  
(from Bone Scan 1988: 46)*

The poet, resisting the position of spectator, evokes engagement which includes the visual but is not limited by the human eye. The birds who see what we cannot, sing the real. They do not map or paint it. For the aesthetician Nicholas Humphrey too, signs in the natural world point to a rich diversity of animate and inanimate objects which is almost beyond knowing, if knowing is limited to the process of representation.<sup>16</sup> With the post-Renaissance reduction to landscape as a predominantly visual aesthetic, we have detached from corporeal experience of the world of diversity and evolution.

Landscape, through whatever its mode of representation - photographs, metaphors, topographic surveys - closes nature off instead of opening it to meaning. The implications of this closure are historical and political. Landscape is a colonial residue, its origins residing in European art, as John Szarkowski argues in his introduction to a selection of famous American landscape photographs:

*The central tradition of European landscape painting finally dispensed with mythology, politics, religion and history, but it did not dispense with man: in front of the wild mountain lay the green pasture with kine or sheep, or cultivated fields, or a road lined with poplars, or...a peasant's house. These pictures celebrated a new sense of cordial intent between man and nature; they expressed the perception that a force of wilderness had been tamed a little, that it was now less terrific, and had become a subject available to the lyric sensibility (1981: 6).*

This lyricism has shafted our imaginations to a 'celebration' of 'cordial intent' so that primary object appreciation and participation

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<sup>16</sup>'Information-process theory' focuses on the natural desire of human beings to gain meaning through classification. In applying this theory, Humphrey suggests that we are attracted to rhymes, rhythms and variations on a theme because we like to classify and are attracted to the natural world for its diversity (Humphrey, 1980: 99).

are excluded from experiencing. Nature has been 'tamed': even wilderness, as a desired landscape, is now mediated through calendars and the viewing platforms of National Parks.<sup>17</sup> On viewing platforms, both literally and figuratively, the spectator may experience the illusion of participating in the scene. Viewing an aestheticised and framed 'nature' may conjure up the sense of place, *genius loci*, home, refuge or emplacement.<sup>18</sup>

In its 'prospect-refuge' role, landscape is defined in reference to the human being experiencing it by the process of observation rather than as spectacle. Landscape, in this meaning, is not predicated on 'the possessive gaze' but on *genius loci* or place specific to the human experience of home. If landscape is to be more than a view *habitus* is required, the corporeal experience of belonging and the capacity of the participant to reflect on that process and awareness.

For the phenomenologist geographer Yi-fu Tuan, *habitus* of place is a 'topophilia' concept which 'embraces all of the human being's activities with the material environment' and translates 'mere space [into]...an intensely human place' (1974: 93). Place in the landscape is relational he believes, a sense that is not conveyed in cartographical

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<sup>17</sup>In his essay 'The Contemporary Environment Movement as Neo-Romanticism: A Re-Appraisal from Tasmania' (in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* Winter 1988) Peter Hay suggests the link between Romantic ideals and conservation of parks is an unsure alliance with many unresolved tensions. Historians (eg Richard Flanagan quoted in Hay's article) have argued that National Parks can be an extension of the pioneer's Romantic ideal.

<sup>18</sup>'Home' is a familiar metaphor for postmodern, ecological consciousness, particularly for ecofeminists, as it signifies 'earth as home', a place where caring, belonging and fundamental relationships take place. Despite the oppression that many women associate with home, certain elements of the landscape can be located as home. Carol Bigwood says: 'Home, as I understand it, is a nomadic place, an unfinished place of variable historical and geographical boundaries, but a belonging place nevertheless' (1993: 292).

traditions (1976: 269).<sup>19</sup> According to Jay Appleton, our aesthetic assumptions,

*...are in part inborn, and...they can only be brought into operation if we provide them with sign-symbols of a kind which can be spontaneously apprehended by a mechanism attuned to the natural environment...an observer must seek to recreate something of that primitive relationship which links a creature with its habitat (1986: 91).*

While the term 'primitive' is slippery and loaded in postcolonial and psychoanalytic discourses, Appleton emphasises the essential difference between the framed-view meaning of landscape and the emplaced belonging sense that I believe is the function of lived experience of the world we map for ourselves from our interior landscapes. Sense of place comes from being 'attuned to the natural environment' through 'relationship' that includes observation but not spectatorship.

In 'Local', Angela Rockel contrasts the personal landscape of home with the detached aspects of landscapes to which one travels for reasons other than intimacy. This immediacy of place rather than detachment by secondary aspection is central to the journey of the self:

#### *Local*

*I've never been much of a traveller.  
This landscape, this house  
and those who pass through it;  
exploration enough for me.  
Each day is a place I visit,*

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<sup>19</sup>According to the 'Topophilia' theory, sense of place is fundamental to life stories. It is influenced by phenomenology and existentialism and aims 'to recover the true character of our everyday, geographical experiences', especially 'marvelling and concern' (Cloke et al, 1991:78).

*its space of light peopled  
 by new creatures, stippled  
 with new seasons' shade and heat.  
 In one place women gather fruit,  
 fingers lit by the wax-purple glow  
 inside a screen of leaves. Elsewhere  
 snarled voices unravel downwind  
 under skies ridged and close  
 as a dog's yawn.  
 I find new rooms, forget them:  
 full of wine or tears  
 faces come and go; all gift,  
 heart's fellow-travellers, the journey.  
 ('Fire Changes Everything' in *Outskirts* 1996: 182)*

Landscape, as a representation in the Cartesian sense, refigures a scene which exists beyond the capacity of the observer to participate deeply within it. If the stimulus for this mimetic reproduction is engaged voyeuristically, landscape apprehension is a way of participating vicariously with the land in default of deeper meaning through partnership and belonging. Enrichment comes from the alert observation of detail that a sense of belonging and participation can engender. As Donald Crawford, art historian, argues:

*We frame a portion of nature, choosing what is to become our field of vision as a composition, in all its intricacy and complexity. It remains nature, but its beauty differs from natural beauty according to the classical conception of formal perfection in one important respect: it is literally relative to the observer (1993: 188).*

Experiencing nature as landscape then can be bounded by seeing its 'beauty' potential for framing or as opened out to participatory attunement by alert observation. Between these two contrasting modes of apprehension is a continuum of experiencing. The possibility



for depth of experiencing is generated by awareness of corporeal memories, the *habitus*.

picture this?

The experience of living in Tasmania is almost synonymous with enjoying views, of the water, islands or mountains. Real estate commodifies 'water views', 'mountain views', and 'wonderful aspect'. How do I engage with those views? Is it only through the visual field? Is topographical elevation essential to the pleasure of viewing? If so, does height presuppose privilege, in feminist and postcolonial terms?

To take my own locality as I begin work on this thesis, from my verandah I see islands and the entrance to Hobart harbour. Just beyond the fringe of trees is Bruny Island and the waters of Trugananna's grave.<sup>20</sup> Closer in seagulls spiral overhead and a grey shrike-thrush collects Huntsman spiders from between the cladding boards near my kitchen window-sill. Native scrub in one selected corner of my garden is regenerating, no longer choked by bracken fern. Erosion, caused by trail-bikers who refuse to leave the reserve that adjoins my house lot, spreads further into the scrublands. At dusk they buzz into my sound-world like amplified hornets. On Saturday afternoon shots from the rifle range shatter the stillness of this chosen sanctuary. Later it will be the drunken footballers spinning 'donuts' on the gravelled corner nearby. I water my garden

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<sup>20</sup>Trugannana, last member of the Bruny tribe of Aborigines and reputed by most history books to be the 'last' Aborigine in Tasmania (see Henry Reynolds 1995 *Fate of a Free People: A Radical Reexamination of the Tasmanian Wars*. Ringwood: Penguin; Cassandra Pybus 1991 *Community of Thieves*. Port Melbourne: William Heinemann).

plants, some endemic, others exotic and happy to coexist with the natives, and select a site for meditation under the banksia trees as bronze-wing pigeons scuttle in under the canopy of acacias and fledgling wattle birds scoop water from the fish pond.

I have moved now into a city-scape, to a suburban cul-de-sac with a wide view west to the mountain and north over roof-tops and power lines. Although traffic noise is disruptive and birds no longer feed from my window, there are familiar markers from past places in which I have lived that contribute to a becoming-sense of place: the mountain has supplanted the coast as a weather vane, and silver wattles, the trees that clotted the valley of a previous home-place, flower in the vacant block behind my house. As rain approaches over the mountain, currawongs descend to scavenge on the compost heap. I am reminded that I am in suburbia when a naked torso appears at a neighbouring window and food is jettisoned into the squabbling flock. My relations with the natural world are participatory but shared now with the interpellations of those, who like me, want more than a spectacular view from the lounge-room window. I think about the designated wilderness beyond the dolomite wall that is the mountain. No longer home to nomadic tribes, it is listed as a National Park 'so we can feel better knowing it's there', as one conservationist put it.

wilderness, unbounded space

Wilderness is in danger of becoming another 'landscape'. Historically seen as 'unbounded' space and/or a domain of terror and repentance

in the postmodern imagination, it is a symbol of 'free' space that is unfettered by pastoral and urban fence-lines or other markers of human habitation. The fragile status of bio-diversity and the shrinking size of areas of 'pristine nature' are contributing to a transformation in perception. Wilderness teeters between perceptions of it as preserved site and sight for the sore eyes of the industrial age.

### *The Wilderness*

*And who would be surprised that it's receding,  
Living as it does on absences of us?  
We ourselves are all that is succeeding,  
and that so well we do not feel our loss.  
The part withheld is all we have been given,  
As though the present strained us like a sieve.  
We come here when we wish to be forgiven  
By the future for the way we live.  
Today the wild expanses that we cherish  
Seem like wearied animals inside  
A zoo of things we know are going to perish,  
Along with those that have already died.  
(Stephen Lefebure, in *Isle*, 1997: 109)*

To the 'environmentally aware', wilderness now signifies all that remains of 'the wild expanses we cherish' in the natural world. The receding areas have been bounded and delineated in order to segregate them for preservation and conservation and it is this awareness of their endangered status that has led to their present framing.

The wilderness is now apprehended through the touristic gaze even if a sense of the grand, limitless and terrible lingers on in the collective perception. As Stephen Muecke puts it:

*In order to 'adventure' into wilderness, the tourist leaves behind Culture, but paradoxically (and disappointingly) rediscovers it in a different but no less visible form. Wilderness is both secured and obliterated by the official gesture - rules for camping, visiting sacred sites, use of vehicles - which establish boundaries; the natural world is set up against the artificial through means that render such an opposition meaningless. It remains for the tourist to bow down and go through the sacred rituals of appreciation (that aspect of 'reconciliation') (in Edquist et al 1994: 78).*

And so the unbounded space, while signifying limitless pristine space to the eco-tourist is experienced only through the boundaries set up within and around it in order to go through the 'ritual' of exploration.

As with 'nature' and 'landscape', 'wilderness' is a space that is increasingly at the mercy of boundaries, but it retains a loftier lineage possibly because of its Biblical association and the common assumption that it is unbounded and beyond the gaze.<sup>21</sup> But the gaze still functions to position it as 'other' in the imagination. Valma Hawkes suggests that wilderness has been both a place and a condition in the Australian psyche. As such it has taken on the paradoxical elements of desert and garden, essentially always the 'other'.

*The wilderness was 'the other' and was only re-located by the settlers as they developed knowledge of and 'geo-pious' attachment to the continent. Once this attachment was acknowledged, the wilderness was pushed 'further out', beyond settlement...Mythology, religion and folklore all added evidence and force to the perception of menace lurking in the forest wilderness (1992: 28).*

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<sup>21</sup>See Genesis 3, The Book of Job, Luke 4 and Matthew 3 & 4 for representations of the wilderness as a space of aridity, evil and struggle.

Wilderness photography, a revered art in environmentalist circles, represents 'bush intact' or pristine wilderness as landscape, the 'pushed out' and discarded space that is also grand and sometimes menacing. This art is a direct link between the Romantic painters, like Eugene Von Guerard and Nicholas Chevalier, for whom Nature was sublime and beautiful, and with the colonial ethic of the land as empty, waiting and mysterious. Distant views and detailed minutiae are usually photographed from vantage points and positions that are reached by extreme difficulty, rendering the 'seer' as heroic in the urban imagination. The attitude of wilderness photographers, founded on desire for a space of untrodden perfection, continues to configure a sense of awe and mystery, even in the representation of detail.<sup>22</sup> It also fosters an alienation for many from the source of the sublime in the cause of preservation (Tim Bonyhady in *Island* #55 1993: 4).<sup>23</sup>

However, a reverence for and sense of transcendence in nature, even from a viewing platform, can serve to foster memories and possibilities for participation and replenishment, as well as nurture a sense of responsibility towards endangered habitats. Wilderness can be, to quote John Ovington and Allan Fox, 'a personal concept established from precepts arising from [a continuum of] earlier

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<sup>22</sup>Photographers Peter Dombrovskis and Olegas Truchanas both died 'in the wilderness' during expeditions. Both men are revered in the Tasmanian environmental movement for their photographs as much as for their intrepid journeys. Their photographs contributed to saving the Franklin River from being dammed in 1983 and brought to public awareness the far reaching consequences of drowning Lake Pedder (see for example Max Angus 1975 *The World of Olegas Truchanas*. Hobart: O.B.M.)

<sup>23</sup>Bob Brown defines wilderness as 'a large tract of entirely natural country...a region of original Earth where one stands with the senses entirely steeped in nature or...where one experiences a complete sensory deprivation of modern technology' (in Barton 1982: 40). He observes that the wilderness areas of the world under threat are only as they are because they were too difficult to access by the iron fist of technological invasion. The rush to conserve them has been due to the advancing march of technological knowledge and opportunism. Ironically, it is the descendants of colonising cultures who so often wish to travel into these areas ostensibly to appreciate them but more often than not only to gaze at the view on the brochure or from the car window.

experiences',<sup>24</sup> that is, from the *habitus* of place. This *habitus*, for the European Australian with little experience of wilderness, is a nexus of experiences of place and imaginary places that has been informed by cultural perceptions of wilderness and moments of personal attunement to a sense of wild-place.

## indwelling

First Nation Australians may be able to teach immigrant-Australians what a deep association with and 'indwelling' of vast space and its special places means so that we can move beyond framing to a deep affinity with places of wild-ness. *Habitus* of place for Aboriginal people who still have close ties with the land comes through belonging.

I had first-hand experience of an Aboriginal community when I attended the 'Bush College', run by the Pitjantjatjara people of the Central Australian desert, in 1997. These folk now live in near-by settled areas but have been made the rightful owners of their homelands by 'white man's law', following Gough Whitlam's initiative in the 1970's. Their lands are bounded by pastoralist leases, where cattle range freely on vast areas of natural grasses, and wilderness is brought under control by the European ethics of hard work, road

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<sup>24</sup>J. D. Ovington and A. Fox question the very existence of a true wilderness because chemicals and radioactive wastes have permeated the planet to almost every corner, rendering pristine areas, or the air around them, contaminated. In this sense, a 'pristine' area then is 'essentialising' of nature. Enlarging semiotic systems to psychological terms, they suggest that wilderness is variable when measured in 'landscape terms' and in the extreme, creates a sense of 'absolute aloneness' and a feeling of self reliance as the unknown is encountered and 'penetrated' (see Martin 1993: 33). The use of the word 'penetrated' unwittingly acknowledges the unconscious absorption of the phallocentric, and therefore colonising, paradigm, even into conservationism.

ways, fence lines and lease contracts. Ironically, as we passed into the Aboriginal lands of the Cave Hill district, the land was described as 'sweeter'.

Wilderness is not a term the Pitjantjatjaras use to describe their vast hunting grounds which contain the landforms that are integral to their creation stories, 'Inma Ngintaka', and sense of place. For the Pitjantjatjaras the European meaning of wilderness implies land devoid of human occupation and therefore uncared for, a vastly different concept from the European construct of pristine beauty or intimidating grandeur but not too far from the Biblical meaning of a space that is unbounded but contained and marked by the stories of those who move within it. Perhaps this is one reason a hybridised form of Christianity cohabits with traditional belief for this tribal group. The visible terrain gave shape to the stories of creation for the Pitjantjatjaras but, although the 'father's country' of Nganyintja, the custodian, was defined by the nearby hills, the whole cosmology was included in the stories and song-lines. Nganyintja told the story of the Ngintaka man (the Perentie Lizard Dreaming story) as we stopped at places in her country that were mentioned in the songs but these places were part of a larger narrative included by a sweep of the arm or a pointing finger to distant mountains and stars:

*As he's coming to Mount Woodroffe he again created all these little ngintakas out of his, out of his spirit, out of his skin, and they were running all around. And there he sat and he sang and sang and sang the ngintaka song, and they danced and they danced there together at Mount Woodroffe...he then left Mount Woodroffe by himself and he travelled back towards his country coming further and further to the west. He came through the country and he travelled and he slept...until he came to the country near the Mann Ranges to a place called Mutingarantja where he rested back because he thought nobody was following*

*him any longer. He put his knee up and rested back and hid the tjiwa behind him* (CD booklet INMA NGINTAKA 1994).

Like so many Europeans who are unable to reflect on mythologies generated by deep affinity with place, I do not have a vocabulary to express a storied and intimate association with the land. Ovington and Fox attempt to explain the richness of Indigenes' experience in generalist terms:

*For perhaps three thousand generations these people had evolved a pattern of customary behaviour and an extremely rich ritual life to create a relatively harmonious coexistence with the Australian ecosystems* (in Martin 1982: 26).

Bob Brown, Australian senator and environmental activist, tries to place the experience of Indigenous people on a larger temporal continuum when he suggests that the human race is

*less than the hundredth generation of technological humans set apart from nature. Hundreds of thousands of previous generations of our human and pre-human species lived in the total wilderness of Earth and...were a living part of that wilderness* (in Barton 1982: 83).

Brown's meaning of 'total wilderness' is predicated on notions of the 'pristine' in environmentalist terms but a deeper meaning is clear: wilderness has a history of being populated, not empty of human life as wilderness calendars represent it and some environmentalists would have it.

The pre-colonial presence and experience of Indigenes cannot be reclaimed. However the sense of intimacy with the land in every dimension of being that is still keenly experienced by tribes such as



the Pitjantjatjaras, while not within the European's recent experience of relationship to wilderness space, can be a model to immigrant settlers for deeper attunement and responsibility. As human geographers Gelder and Jacobs point out, sense of the sacred for Aborigines in Australia is *all-over-the-place* so that perceptions of the land do not include representation in the Euro-centric sense. It is presumptuous for white settlers to reduce Aboriginal sense of place to only a few key sites and zones. As my time spent in the desert showed me, while there were some sacred sites out-of-bounds to Europeans, the whole country was a shifting grid of places that could be made sacred in the moment of song in that place.

For non-indigenous Australians, this alienation from nature and from our deeper selves has led to a continuing 'othering' of wild areas as inhospitable or prized and an inability to identify, in a deeply relational and experiential sense, with the land outside or even within our immediate location or to recognize the deep significance to people for whom land is a way-of-being. For Indigenous peoples who continue to live in partnership with the land, as far as possible, given the depleted food sources resulting from introduced species,<sup>25</sup> nature remains, and should continue to remain, in Merchant's words, 'a dynamic creative and regulatory principle' rather than a space to be closed off for fear of contamination or so it can be enjoyed by the few adventurous visitors.

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<sup>25</sup> Pitjantjatjaras live close to the land during seasonal encampments but remain in nearby proximity in their townships at other times. It is a source of great grief to the custodian Nganyinytja that food sources can no longer sustain them over long periods. One of the principle causes of this depletion is the abundance of feral animals like camels and donkeys that have been turned loose by white settlers (Nganyinytja's talks translated by Diana James at Amata, South Australia, in 1997).

Closing off land can be read as analogous to 'feminising' within Western discourses' long history of alterity whereby woman and land are recognised through the gaze and situated as other in the European imagination. From an Aboriginal example of living on land in Australia which English-speaking non-Aborigines call 'wilderness' come lessons of particular importance to women.

### land en-gendered

Whether as 'wilderness', 'landscape' or 'nature', the world outside has, in Western discourse, been gendered as female when it is not built space.<sup>26</sup> The effect of this gendering of land as female flows back into the representation of women as embodying characteristics attributed to the land. Merchant in *Death of Nature* says:

*Women and nature have an age-old association - an affiliation that has persisted throughout culture, language and history...Common to both is an egalitarian perspective. Women are struggling to free themselves from cultural and economic constraints that have kept them subordinate to men...Environmentalists, warning us of the irreversible consequences of continuing environmental exploitation, are*

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<sup>26</sup>Kay Schaffer suggests that 'in the relationship of the Australian character to the bush, her (feminine construct) is registered through metaphors of landscape' (1988: 22). Annette Kolodny says: 'we may indeed have long ago ceased to self-consciously or attentively think about the feminine in the landscape, but that does not mean we have ceased to experience it or to act in such a way that our behaviour manifests such experience at its deepest level of motivation' (1975: 149). Simon Ryan says: 'Exploration is a gendered practice. It is structured in terms of an active male penetrating the inert yet resistant female land...It [the land] is a puzzle - a mysterious woman from whom the veil needs to be ripped and who is ruthlessly interrogated visually'. Ryan quotes from explorers' notebooks, such as this one from John Lort Stokes: 'To ascend a hill and say you are the first civilized man that has ever trod on this spot; to gaze around from its summit and behold a prospect over which no European eye has ever before wandered; to descry new mountains; to dart your eager glance down unexplored valleys and unvisited glens; to trace the course of rivers whose waters no white man's boat has ever cleaved, and which tempt you onwards into the bosom of unknown lands:- these are the charms of an explorer's life' (1996: 196-198).

*developing an ecological ethic emphasising the interconnectedness between people and culture (1983: xix).*

This deeply ingrained perception that unites the struggles of women and ecology is bound into the binaries of culture, language and history - the cultural codes to which we are so often blind yet which rule our lived experience. The language of the dominant paradigm is reductive, essentialist and all-pervasive, leaving women and the land little breathing space from which to speak, as subjects, of space, desire and production. It is through resonance to place and the *habitus* of experiencing that women can reinvent a sense of themselves that is not strangled by androcentricism, raised on pedestals nor silenced, as Other, by the gaze.<sup>27</sup> But how is that to be achieved?

### dangers of the essentialist trap

In her book *Crazy for you: The making of women's madness*, Jill Astbury points to the essentialist assumptions, particularly in relation to madness, that have prevailed since the nineteenth century

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<sup>27</sup>The concept of 'Other' is central to 'Orientalism', Edward Said's theory of perception of the 'East' as Object. He argues that this construct is based on projected Western demons of the soul and is a long-standing way of identifying the East as 'Other' and inferior to the West (1978: 1-2). There are many parallels for feminism such as the 'feminisation' of land (as Other) and with the objectification of women (as Other) by the male gaze.

Luce Irigaray, reflecting on psychoanalysis, says: '[s]o woman can function as place - evanescent beyond, point of discharge - as well as time - eternal return, temporal detour - for the sublimation and, if possible, mastery over death. She will also be the representative-representation...in other words, of the death drives that cannot (or theoretically could not) be perceived without horror, that the eye (of) consciousness refuses to recognize. In a protective misprision that cannot be put aside without the failure of a certain gaze: which is the whole point of castration. Up to this point, the main concepts of psychoanalysis, its theory, will have taken no account of woman's desire, not even of "her" castration' (in Warhol & Herndl 1997: 436).

As John Berger explains in *Ways of Seeing* '[a] woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself....From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually....She turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight' (1972: 22).

about women's 'nature'. She suggests that the 'possibility of asking questions about how culture fashioned the lineaments of this..."nature"' has been circumvented by 'the dominance of the essentialist view that women's "nature" was unmediated by culture'. She proposes that:

*Only with an acknowledgement of the social construction of gender does it become possible to examine the psychological impact of growing up female in a society that historically has defined 'female' as less than fully human (1996: 13).*

Various attempts by feminists have been made to redress the balance, recuperate space and humanise our sex. The chorus of voices that is ecofeminism includes the gynocentric stream that bases their idealised concepts on Marija Gimbutas's percepts following discoveries of goddess figurines at Catal Huyuk in Turkey.<sup>28</sup> While Carol Christ defends this need for a 'thealogy',<sup>29</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that this idyllic notion comes from a deep need for women to reconnect with the land and to identify with mythologies of the feminine rather than with the masculine.<sup>30</sup> Buddhist scholar and

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<sup>28</sup> Marija Gimbutas suggests that Catal Huyuk is an 'ideal' for a non-aggressive society but also as a historical foundation on which to build a sense of the land and female being interconnected rather than objectified. She believes that these societies lacked gender ranking, they were matrilineal and the focus of worship was on the goddess. This peaceful and agrarian society (which she exaggerates to include most of Europe) existed until 4500 BCE when waves of invading, militaristic, horse-riding, male-lead tribes penetrated their culture. So began the decline of matriarchy and the rise of patriarchy (quoted in Ruether 1992: 150).

<sup>29</sup> Carol Christ suggests some viable reasons for a 'thealogy': a Goddess-centred, archetype-based spirituality. Applying phenomenology, she isolates the meaning of the symbol for women as: 1, an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power; 2, an affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed in it; 3, the positive valuation of will in a Goddess-centred ritual; 4, the significance of the Goddess for a revaluation of women's bonds and heritage (see S. Genew (ed) 1991: 291).

<sup>30</sup> Ruether makes the significant point that the more one studies different religions the more one is tempted to suggest that religion itself is essentially a male creation. Rather than upholding an idealised vision of Goddess-worshipping societies she proposes that Goddess figures in early religions functioned to give males supremacy through sublimating the mysteries of gestation and birth to ritual expressions (suggesting the male felt marginalised from direct participation in these phenomena). Ruether locates three possible stages of androcentric religion: 1, 'the male sublimates female procreative functions into a Great

Deep Ecologist Joanna Macy suggests that the repression of the feminine is evidenced by the ascendancy of female gods in most world religions and the corresponding denigration of women's experience in those countries.<sup>31</sup>

My own voice in the chorus is strengthened by aspects of these models but is sceptical of rigid systems and fixed meanings and in particular is wary of essentialist trends that may label creative work as implicitly female or feminine.

what is 'the feminine'?

'Feminine', 'female' and 'feminist' are terms that often lose clarity through misunderstanding. Toril Moi asserts that this fussiness of meaning has clouded the political and theoretical concerns of debates by and for women. She suggests we need to distinguish between 'feminism' as a political position, 'femaleness' as a matter of biology and 'femininity' as a set of culturally defined characteristics (quoted in Belsey 1997: 104).

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Mother Goddess, situates himself as the son and beloved...and is...rescued from death and enthroned as king through the power of the Mother' (implicit in myths of Innana, Ishtar, Anath, Isis and in Christian Marianology); 2, 'the great Mother is dethroned and subordinated as the creaturely Mother Earth and Church, created and ruled over by a Father God' - female becomes symbol of that which is to be ruled over...shunned by male mind; 3, 'the male leadership class emancipates itself from religious tutelage and assumes direct power over the cosmos through science, while relegating religious piety to a private world identified with women' - male clerical class, female nuns, female workers (in Gunew (ed) 1991: 277).

<sup>31</sup>For example, in Ireland and India, where Catholicism and Hinduism (respectively) have wide-reaching influence, the female presence is obvious in the iconography of saints, shrines and goddesses. The extent of female liberation however is significantly less than in countries with no visible female symbols. Yet, ironically, it is often these countries that have women leaders who are very successful (eg Mary Robinson in Ireland and Indira Ghandi in India). While Buddhism may offer an ideal of equality, the reality for many women in Buddhist countries is poverty and disempowerment (see for example Chatsumarn Kabilsingh 1991 *Thai Women in Buddhism* Boston: Parallax, p81).

Just as ecofeminism, in its diversity, is united in the fight for justice for women and the land and for women reliant on the land, so is feminism, in all its many guises, committed to a discourse which is united in the struggle against sexism and patriarchy. Feminists have become literary theorists as well as materialists because they strive to 'make explicit the politics of the so-called 'neutral' or 'objective' works of their colleagues as well as to act as cultural critics in the widest sense of the word' (Moi quoted in Belsey 1997: 205). The expanse of feminist ideas seems to reflect the enormity of the task before them: 'any approach that can be successfully appropriated to their political ends must be welcome' says Moi (1997: 105).

Being 'female' - having a body that is not male, to put it in dichotomous terms - does not presuppose a feminist attitude. I have become increasingly feminist and environmentally political as experience has shown me the injustices of lived experience for women and the poor status of ecological systems in patriarchal and less organised cultures. The rapid rise of ecofeminism is not surprising, given our shared suffering!

My interest in feminism began at age fifteen when I noticed the privileges my four brothers enjoyed because their lived experience was apprehended through male bodies. Domestic chores were my responsibility in preparation for 'life', as I was conditioned, by mixed signals as the only daughter, to see career as important but a husband and a 'glory box' as more so. My brothers were free to earn pocket money - although I found a subversive way to do this - to display more 'extreme' behaviours and slip out of chores, whereas I

had to be on my best behaviour, perform violin solos for visitors and show an interest in pretty clothes and things-domestic. My greatest subversive act, from age fifteen, was to cross-dress, to appear male-like - or androgynous I realise in retrospect - by way of fitting into the male paradigm that was privileged over the female, but also to rebel in subtle ways against the expectation of submission, femininity and passivity. It was at this time that female and feminism began to merge in my experience, although I was completely unaware of the latter term until it was conflated with 'Women's Lib' derogatively by men in the seventies. Later I shrugged off these dress-ups/downs during marriage while trying to keep the peace through passivity and maternity. Inevitably the suppressed knowledge and feelings surfaced and I chose singlehood rather than continuing to compromise by appearing 'feminine' to a husband's gaze. A more recent crisis has been a move towards bisexuality and androgyny: an acceptance of my desire to share my sexed body with those of my own kind as well as an expression of dissatisfaction at patriarchal 'norms' in relationships and male expectations of 'naturalness'. Each of these stages has been fraught with terror and confusion yet necessary to self-agency. Self-agency, or authenticity, is the root of feminism, and, ultimately, of being-human.

'Female' is often collapsed into 'feminine'. It is also frequently laboured as an adjective to express alterity, an opposite of masculine, the world women experience. Moi suggests that 'femininity' and 'natural' have been conflated in patriarchal language systems. To be 'feminine' is to succumb to standards of naturalness. It is in patriarchal interests, Moi suggests, that the terms 'female' and 'feminine' stay confused, and, as Astbury reminds us, that they

signify a 'natural' inclination towards madness. 'Patriarchy...wants us to believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness, called "femininity"' (Moi 1997: 108).

## performing gender norms

Feminist Judith Butler is clear when she says that subjectivity is a response to being in the world: we perform ourselves through the production of repetitive acts. Categories of sex, gender and sexuality are not identity tags but performances (1990: 141). This idea clearly puts pay to patriarchal (and gynocentric) essentialist views that see women as embodying naturalness. In light of women's writing and musical composition, the theory of performance of gender is crucial so that essentialism does not presuppose 'feminine norms' in creativity. In my section on women composers I have slurred into essentialist territory while searching for space between in which to describe and depict creative intentions and interpretations. This slurring however is also an admission of the sexed body rather than a denial of its presence.

Suzanne Cusick, feminist musicologist, claims, in acknowledgement of Butler, that,

*[g]ender norms...are like oral traditions in music or dance, requiring continual rehearsal and performance if they are to remain 'living' parts of a culture's norms. Like any other set of oral performance traditions a culture's performances of gender are in some sense improvisational, both susceptible and open to the inevitability of intentional or unintentional change, to be kept alive (in Macarthur/Poynton 1999: 88).*



And Elizabeth Grosz asks, 'can we assess any 'text' (that is, any discursive practice) as feminine or feminist or as women's texts? That is, in view of gender being a performance, is writing by women only explicable in terms of the production of repetitive acts of being-woman? Grosz sites four categories that have enabled critics to categorise literature and art as feminist or feminine: 1) the sex of the author; 2) the content of the text; 3) the sex of the reader; and 4) the style of the text. She proposes that all these positions are problematic and instead proposes (from the work of Emile Benveniste and Jacques Derrida) a strategy that takes elements from each position but adds 'discursive positioning',

*a complex relation between the corporeality of the author, that is the author's textual residues or traces, the text's materiality, and its effects in marking the bodies of the author and readers, and the corporeality and productivity of readers (1995: 18).*

It is this 'discursive positioning' that allows me to move in liminal space while writing as a woman, performing what I know yet challenging all that knowledge disgorges in experience.

## performing sexuality

Being heterosexual, for me, meant being a preordained image in the focussed sights of male preferences while seeing no way out from under that gaze. As a married woman any deviation from that 'shape' was a cause for commentary: bigger thighs, larger hips, putting on weight while pregnant, skin changes, wrinkles and mood swings were all referred to in subtle but persuasive terms as unacceptable signs of imperfection and aging. By chance I inherited from my father a

youthful face which, translated into lived experience of marriage in Western society, means that I did not receive many of the jibes - including being replaced by a younger woman - that other women have suffered from husbands as they age.

However I have watched my peers either lose their husbands to younger women ('never over 35', as the saying goes) or take on partners twenty years their senior for whom they enact the 'perpetual virgin' role in the male imagination. The number of 'crones' (single women over 45) is on the increase, as many women prefer singlehood to repeating history.

As my own journey exemplifies, finding a language to describe women's experience and a space in which to be defined without the penetrating gaze of masculinity is an ongoing project for women, feminist or otherwise. As Elizabeth Grosz observes however, the search for a space that is non-gendered is largely misplaced as no matter how much we 'cross-dress', there remain only two (unstable) sexed bodies: male and female. Patriarchal culture has determined how those bodies will be described by excluding women's desire from the equation. The task for feminists is to evolve a vocabulary of their own that articulates women's experience, desire and production as *becoming* rather than as fixed in a language of masculinist desire:

*One thing remains clear though: whenever the same models are used to discuss female and male sexuality, when sexuality is conceived in generic or human terms, it will remain inadequate for assessing the particularities, the differences that mark female sexuality as other than male sexuality (Grosz 1995: 224).*

And so I search for ways of voicing my own being-in-the-world.

## story

A bushwalking experience of years ago lives on in my memory. In desperate need to 'go bush', I misunderstood a Hobart Walking Club advertisement of a 'Hard Walk' as long, which I didn't mind, when in fact, as it turned out, it was an off-track 'bash' almost at running pace over four days in heavy terrain. I discovered, when it was too late to turn back and I had no transport of my own if I had done so, that I had joined a pack of 'greyhound' walkers who took to the bush every weekend with one goal in mind: conquest. For four days - after my pack had been lightened by the leader so I could keep up and I had been severely admonished to 'stay up with the pack' - I was 'driven' to mountain climbing and scoparia-bashing<sup>32</sup> so that when a pinnacle was reached, a sigh of satisfaction could be heaved. From there another mountain was viewed accompanied by predictions of further attempts or boasts about previous attainments. Language abounded with hyperbole and metaphor. Stories of sexual conquest by the men were legion. No-one stopped to listen to bird sounds, appreciate wild flowers, wonder at the stillness and silence or take opportunities for solitude. Attunement to presence was impossible with the percussive accompaniment of constant chatter between the walkers all walking in close file. The two women on the trek had imbibed this attitude from years of exposure to it and encouraged both the language of successful exploration and the 'boys' metaphors of sexual desire and gratification. They all considered my efforts to be weak and pathetic - when in fact I had no difficulty scrub-bashing or climbing due to years of experience clearing blackberries from the steep bushland on

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<sup>32</sup>Dense, waist-high scrub with sharp leaves. This species is endemic to alpine altitude areas of Tasmania (see Winifred Curtis 1967 *The Endemic Flora of Tasmania*. London: Ariel).

which I lived - until I showed that I could manage 'four-wheel-drive' walking as well as they. However I remained 'in camp' for several hours while the party set off for more desperate peak runs as this was the only chance for solitude and reflection. It was in these times that I felt the cool air on my face, noticed wild flowers hidden in cushion plants and watched the sun set as though for the first time.

This desire to conquer from a vantage point had little relevance to my feminine sensibilities, although I enjoyed the blissful experience of alpine walking. The wilderness space was sacralised for me through observation of detail and through stillness in contemplation of the 'sublime'.

I think back to the time spent living on a piece of rough bushland in the Huon Valley where I was often in conflict over whether or not to allow the land to heal from overgrazing and fertilisation or to continue to carve my name on it with fire tracks, culverts, house sites and tree felling for building materials. I was caught in a net that required balancing my own immediate needs with those of ecological habitats close by. By the time I left this valley, thirteen years later, the land had regenerated to some extent and wallabies and native cats were returning to shelter in the forest and undergrowth. In every home-place I have planted trees, leaving behind a legacy of regeneration, like a signature of partnership, and in this place I left, amongst others, a forest of *Casuarina* saplings planted below the house to prevent land-slip. Yet my scars could be seen on the land as well!

recognition and responsibility

In his article *Marks in the Landscape*, artist-photographer David Stephenson questions the art of wilderness photography so revered by environmental ethicists. The 'rich, highly saturated and often exaggerated colours of vegetation, "the garden", suggest a rampant fecundity of nature whose body is offered up for an almost pornographic consumption by the viewer'. Transgressing this Edenesque 'sacred space' he says, is seen by environmentalists as desecration and confined by a 'rigidly encoded set of environmental ethics'. Stephenson's solution to this spectatorship and feminisation is to include a hand, a figure, a disused dam wall or signals of photographic processing in his photographs of wilderness (1994: 45). These photographs, while demonstrating the human factor implicit in gaze and desire that bracket land for consumption, also act as a sharp reminder of the impact on the land, as a blank or passive text, by the compass-and-blade-bearing colonialist. These photographs, and other postmodern art works, deconstruct and subvert the text while engaging with the observation process, the 'force of thinking while doing', both in the event of perception and after the event, as production. They ask the audience to confront their own consumer expectations of representation and apprehension.

This joining of signs and texts from a visual artist, aside from colonial implications, cued further questioning of my own about the ways I apprehend the land. As a female participant, do I engage with the meaning of that text both as primary signifier and metaphor? How do the spectator-as-artist and vista collude to construct a landscape in the cultural imagination? Do I revisit the land in the viewfinder, on the wall as calendar photograph or Arthur Boyd painting, or as

programmatic music or poetic metaphor in order that the aesthetic production, or re-production, be treasured through its re-presentation? Is the land I am seeing, reading or listening to 'real' or only a figuration of the artists', and now my, imagination? Is the real, the tangible object that generated the sign, reduced to a representation because of my collusion in an activity of surveillance?

Figuring or re-figuring of land as Other, while sensitizing the viewer's gaze to apprehension of the aesthetic experience often forecloses an opportunity for deeper attunement and, what in Taoist philosophy is called, interpenetration: that is participation and partnership that brings with it responsibility. Othering, whether from a verandah or from the floor of a gallery, selects, and consequently only frames, a portion, leaving the rest beyond the frame. In the act of photographic bracketing, the land becomes landscape, or Other (and feminised) and evolves from the real object to the aesthetic object. A visualising process takes place that facilitates the construction of the aesthetic in the spectator's mind in the absence or reduction of the real or authentic.

In phenomenological terms, during the process of objectification the subject loses hold of the true experience of relationship with the object because the experience of recognition has been reduced rather than enlarged to full, lived experience. Fuller meaning and belonging are closed by the act of distancing and framing, just as women's desire is closed to becoming by masculinist description of it. A segment of the natural, organic world, has been bracketed off for the purposes of immediate survey or for a later metaphorical reading but not for partnership (lived experience) with it. In order to frame

this segment it is necessary for the viewer to detach from the scene and render it with disinterestedness<sup>33</sup>, objectivity and closure - qualities inherent in masculinist desire - despite the fact that the initial captivation may have been an existential sharing through direct participation, subjective appreciation and meaning-search.

The meaning we attach to landscape then, as a segment of nature or wilderness, in order to construct it for ourselves, hinges on the unifying sign 'scenery', or 'what is perceived', whether in mimesis, representation or observation of the actual segment of land. Cultural history has attached a representational meaning to something that has a deeper significance, one that Aboriginal people living in close affinity with the land demonstrate by 'indwelling' place. For non-indigenes crossing the gap between place and its representation, a process which is so often spoken of with longing, could be prompted through the deepening experience of emplacement. In essence, this is a self-discovery and re-mythologizing process for non-indigenes in Australia, especially recent immigrants, and for Indigenous people dispossessed of place who are seeking indwelling in a land that is both alien and becoming-home.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Aesthetics theorists Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell suggest that an attitude of 'disinterestedness' cannot abide the 'object orientation of appreciation' which assimilates with its sources (1993: 30).

<sup>34</sup> In telling the true history of land dispossession in Australia, Henry Reynolds has influenced the successful Mabo case and raised public awareness of Indigenous land rights (see *Fate of a Free People: A Radical Re-examination of the Tasmanian Wars*. Ringwood: Penguin 1995; *The Law of the Land*. Ringwood: Penguin 1992; *Why Weren't We Told...* Ringwood: Penguin/Viking 1999).

en-titled to emplacement?

The loss of lands over several generations by Aboriginal people is exemplified in the fracture that the 'stolen generation' has endured. As Sally Morgan's book *My Place* (1987) and recent commentary so well portrays, dispossession - enforced departure from land and kinship ties - is a continuing bereavement and exhumation process for many mixed race Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>35</sup>

My childhood, until aged 12, was spent living in a home with four 'delinquents' as well as my 'nuclear' family. Established by my parents ostensibly as a harbour for girls and women from 'broken homes' and prisons, the true motivation was generated by a higher calling: to convert these 'way-siders' to the 'Way, the Truth and the Life' of the New Testament Gospel.

Although this 'home' is now closed<sup>36</sup> and minimal contact has been maintained with the many women and girls who came through its doors, the experiences of those years has left an indelible stain on my experience. As my awareness of Aboriginal history in Australia became sharpened, I began to dwell on my memories of two Aboriginal

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<sup>35</sup>In a recent interview, Sally Morgan says: 'For my grandmother, it [a genuine apology by John Howard] would be a meaningless gesture because the loss was too great. When I wrote *My Place*, we thought Nan had only one child. We've since found out that she had at least six children, and they were all taken away. So I think for people like my grandmother there's nothing that could compensate for that scale of loss....And the thing is...Nan's story would be a very common story, not exceptional. There was no birth control in those days' (see Victoria Laurie in *The Australian Magazine* October 23-24 1999: 18). For a white foster parent's perspective, see Kathleen Mary Fallon 'A Close Look at Cloudstreet' in *ABR* October 1999: 23-28.

<sup>36</sup>In June 1999 I returned to this place in suburban Melbourne for the first time in more than 25 years and spoke to the current residents. Plans have been approved for 'The Open Door' to be torn down so that a block of flats can be erected by a developer. It is a cruel irony that all that will remain of this 'transit home' will be some enormous European trees, planted by my father, that are now the centre of a fight for their preservation.



teenaged girls who spent several months with us. I heard not long ago that one of these women had made contact with a liberal-minded church in the inner suburbs of Melbourne and it had become her centre for community. She died before I could speak with her but in his book *Street of Hope: Finding God in St Kilda*, the then pastor of the church, Tim Costello, holds Eva up as an example of generosity and hospitality:

*Poverty-stricken after a childhood like those described in the Bringing Them Home report, Eva had become a sort of Mother Teresa. Her smoke-filled room used to be full of lonely drifters. I was there on one occasion when a burly breathless guy stumbled in with a story of having been rolled and ripped off in the street outside. Without hesitation, Eva gave him her last money, a \$20 note....It was a lesson for me: here was someone free enough to give all that she had away...<sup>37</sup>*

The transit-zone home that was Eva's was shared with others for whom belonging was also in process. The space they shared falls between the clearly demarcated boundaries of society. Of Elaine I know nothing. Her photograph has sat on my piano for many years now. As girls together we lived like sisters and yet I had the security of a stable home and a settled upbringing because my skin colour was privileged over hers. Like Eva, she came to us from a 'corrective' institution and after several months would probably have returned to one for a minor misdemeanour, such as shoplifting or pregnancy. Her image haunts me as I write.

It is naive to assume that these women were not victims of the 'Aboriginal Protection' regime that was still operating in the late 1950s when they lived with us. As Peter Read says:

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<sup>37</sup>This quote is from the extract published in *The Australian Magazine* December 19-20, 1998: 26.

*[w]hole communities have expressed what it meant to have their families traumatised and their future leadership removed and blown to the four winds. Now we can see the policy for what it was - an attempt to put an end to the Aboriginal people of Australia (1998: 4).*

While Elaine and Eva found a temporary shelter in my parents' 'triple-fronted, brick-veneer suburban dwelling' - and Eva has been quoted by Costello as saying that the time with us was a happy one - belonging could be neither emplacement nor indwelling for these women who had fallen below the identity line. Eva's early death was a result of the life-style she had fallen into through the long search for a place of her own. As in so many cases, it is the church that provides a haven for the displaced, a quasi-sacred place which is, in reality, a surrogate community.

### all-over-the-place?

Attempting to redress the balance of the urban/land binary in the wake of the Wik, Mabo and Native Title debates, Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs, in their recent interdisciplinary book *Uncanny Australia*, explore the notion of the sacred as 'all over the place'. In their chapter 'The Modern Sacred', they claim that:

*...Aboriginal sacredness figures much more largely, and insistently, in this country these days. Far from being left behind as a relic or as a residue, it may even be able to determine aspects of Australia's future; far from being out of place in Australia, it sometimes seems (to an increasing number of commentators) to be all over the place (1998: 1).*

*All over the place* is their catch phrase, as they sustain a case for postcoloniality as a lively dialogue between the 'impulse...towards reconciliation at one moment, and division at another: 'one nation' and divided 'nation' (22). The 'Mute' residue of marginality can become 'all over the place' by being at once, secret and talked about, place specific and *terra nullius*, wilderness and town. This term encapsulates the kernel of the human condition's affinity with place - it is inescapable and always pulsing for meaning and it resonates with what I experience in improvisatory practice: the sense of meaning coming and going in time and space as I 'indwell' the moment in the space of creativity.

But Gelder and Jacob's concept, while located in a political and historiographic agenda, is also appropriate to an ecofeminist search for spatial meaning. Just as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait narratives of Australia are diverse and 'all-over-the-place', whether as sacred, utilitarian or sites of dispossession, so too is the search for places of belonging that are free of the gaze crucial to women's sense of self. Eva and Elaine, doubly disadvantaged as mixed-race Aboriginal women, fell into the gap created by the imperialistic stare. They carried with them the woundings of 'damaged space'. But for them sacred place is not a site to be reclaimed (as they may well never have known their birthplace or parentage) but a place of acceptance that is all-over-the-place and within the self in the process of belonging and in found-community.

Sense of place, so central to the building of an undamaged self-construct, is intrinsic to identity, and as such, central to the discourses of postcolonialism and ecofeminism. Landscape, as a

signifier, is infused with coloniality, representation of the female and Aboriginal absence, whereas land is the grid of places and countries in which attunement can occur. As Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, a Rembarrnga man of Arnhem Land puts it:

*...That's what this part of Arnhem Land is like. Other places are all right but here in the middle you've got to talk to the country. You can't just travel quiet, no. Otherwise you might get lost, or have to travel much further. That's the law for the centre of Arnhem Land. For Rembarrnga people...*

*My father used to do it. We used to get up early in the morning and he'd sing out and talk. Sometimes he didn't talk early in the morning, only when travelling and we used to stop and he'd talk then in language.*

*It would make you look carefully at the country, so you could see the signs, so you could see which way to go...*

*...the law about singing out was made like that to make you notice that all trees here are your countrymen, your relations. All the trees and the birds are your relations. There are different kinds of birds here. They can't talk to you straight up. You've got to sing out to them so they can know you...*

*That's why I talked to the birds this morning, and all the birds were happy. All the birds were really happy and sang out: 'oh! That's a relation of ours. That's a relation we didn't know about'. That's the way they spoke, and they were happy then to sing out (see 'Talking History' in *Land Rights News* July 1988, quoted in Deborah Bird Rose 1996: 15).*

In this account, Wainburranga tells indwelling through a narrative of experience with chthonic earth rather than with the land as other and prospect. He does not *withdraw* from his storied connections to create a *tableau vivant* of the spectator. His sense of place is created by momentarily contacts within the country that he traces by walking through it and upon it. Rembarrngas sing their country.

As Galurrwuy Yunupingu, controversial political figure in Australian land rights claims, writes:

*The land is my backbone, I only stand straight, happy, proud and not ashamed about my colour because I still have land. The land is the art. I can paint, dance, create and sing as my ancestors did before me. My people recorded these things about our land this way, so that I and all others like me may do the same.*

*I think of the land as the history of my nation. It tells us how we came into being and in what system we must live. My ancestors who lived in the time of history planned everything that we practice now. The law of history says we must not take land, fight over land, steal land, give land and so on. My land is mine only because I came in spirit from that land and so did my ancestors of the same land...The land is my foundation. I stand, live and perform as long as I have something firm and hard to stand on (quoted in Rose 1996: 40).*

Central Australian female poet Damala Rainow reshapes into myth a similar sense of history as an indwelling which refuses the boundaries conventional to European representation in Australia:

*Oma*

*She travelled from the  
past, over the sea*

*As a crone she stretches  
both hands  
one back, one forward  
bringing both to the meal -  
Always with herbs, parsley, chives and sweet mint  
bitter wormwood.*

*My grandmother  
her grandmother  
their blood in my body).  
their dreaming in my soul  
(Spirit of the Land #3, 1999: 21)*

## difference and diversity in reading and seeing

Non-Aboriginal Australians cannot acquire Aboriginal indwelling, and even to imagine the possibility is to propose a new form of appropriation, but if the colonial model can be shifted, new interchanges, new processes of coming together may be possible. Stephen Muecke's work charts Euro-centric landscape perception while tracking the pathways of Aboriginal people still living close to the land. He uses techniques as a linguist to cipher the land-myths that valorise a grounded, congruent land-sense as opposed to the Eurocentric telescopic, framed sense. Muecke suggests that an enclosed, horizon-focused way of seeing has reduced our capacity to see 'what is already there in a quite different way'. The 'different way' is that of the Indigenous experience of the earth which is 'totally inscribed, written, densely named, but not necessarily a country which is seen, which has light as a factor. Landscape, in Aboriginal terms, has no perspective; it is sung and felt as much as seen' (in Edquist et al 1994: 167).

Meucke has travelled extensively throughout the dry arid regions of Australia with local Aboriginal people, attempting to rewrite, for European eyes and in Aboriginal terms, a land which has to be cyphered rather than fenced by a horizon on paper. With Aboriginal elder Paddy Roe and painter Krim Benterrak, he tracked the land by foot, 'tracing a path which the eye can follow into the space which is tomorrow's painting' (1989: 192), and transcribed the spatial patterns rather than the topographical terrain. What is unique about his work is that he was able as a linguist to re-present the land in ways which challenge our semiotic presuppositions. He re-wrote an

ancient mythology and culture which had been reduced to surveys and cartographic tools by the European passion for representation of local topographies. The 'speaking, writing and painting is in response...to what might be called a "politics of place"' that Meucke applies from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1989 :11).

Muecke saw the landscape of Roebuck Plains, far north Western Australia, as being there to be *read* rather than to be viewed and framed. 'The botanist reads the country in terms of its plant life, the tourist in terms of its beauty and so on' (12) and so a reading of a place can be dictated by the needs of the times. As history no longer finds a place for these approaches, they fade into disuse.

The resistance to displacement is perhaps exemplified in the resurgence of interest in mythology, ecological studies and tribal narratives: a collective desire to read the land as narrative fragments and *genius loci* rather than as lines on a map or panoramas on a calendar. The diversity of readings and interpretations also allows room for a return to fundamentalist belief and colonial-style racism and its attendant representational constructs that is evident in the plurality of postmodernity. Muecke situates these attitudes in the ways we respond emotionally to the place we inhabit:

*Nor are the possibilities of reading as numerous as the individuals who might come to this place. Although everyone might have their own private, mental response to a place, the reading only emerges as they attempt to 'express' this feeling: they must talk, sing, write, paint, take photographs and so on. These ways of representing things carry with them determined sets of meanings with which people can grapple, but with which they*

*must of necessity start in their endeavour to make sense of things* (1989: 13).

To make sense of things then is responding to lived experience and to *habitus*. Muecke engages with his own experience as a linguist in an attempt to decipher the land as text in the Aboriginal sense rather as Other. Muecke suggests that a new sensitivity to the environment can be achieved by seeing and reading what is there in a different way.

Muecke chooses to call his work 'nomadology' (from Deleuze and Guattari), a way of looking at a place by reading and seeing the fragments which contribute to the form. He turns to Krim Bentarrak's paintings as genre-breakers, refusing the rules of landscape and cartography. Bentarrak's paintings 'perform' a land that is always in process so that the painting

*is not representational like a landscape, and it is not metrical, (obeying grid squares) like a map. Its colours and lines flow around the contours of a country...iconographic sand-drawings...(1989: 217).*

sounding differently

Muecke's nomadology influenced the making of the score that accompanies my composition *Sonic Arc* in the creative section of this thesis. As I reflected on my sense of looking at views, at the constructions of landscape through maps that I have been conditioned to interpret, and at the notated scores that map sound, I wanted to disrupt those conditioned meanings and rewrite the



signifiers so that a sense of 'unbeginning' was figured. *Sonic Arc's* 'score' is a chart/painting with fragments of musical motifs for improvisatory play, ritual signs (spiral) and images from the non-human world (bird shapes, wind signifiers), 'flowing around the contours' signifying the human voice from before, during and after time.

Recasting a score in this way was rejuvenating from the ecological point of view and empowering from a personal perspective. I felt freer to move beyond the strangulations of patriarchal education and its choking languages for interpreting sound, place and being.

## desert tracking

My time with the Pitjantjatjaras gave me the opportunity to see how the land-as-text works in action. Here the land spoke, wrote itself, inscribing its own meaning on the lives of the people and then on me by means of their interpretation and my limited, but very real, lived experience

So the trail of the Ngintaka Man (Perentie lizard) followed the sky hills, valleys and caverns of a vast area where it seemed that every mark on the land, from the rocky outcrops to a scratch on a rock, was a thread in the narrative. It was the women on most occasions who told the stories, who weeded the Ngintaka's footprints and led us into the bowels of Ngintaka's stomach-cave, who danced and sang their 'Inma' around the fireside later in the evening. The men joined in with a deep acknowledgment and respect through dance and song or

by silent assent. Children played out the stories and joined in the activities and the governing feeling was one of communality, partnership, companionship and participation with each other, with the land and with its stories.

My experience and observation accords with the generalist claims made by Barry Lopez:

*...[I]ndigenous people pay much closer attention to nuance in the physical world. They see more, and from a paucity of evidence, thoroughly observed, they can deduce more....[and] their history in a place, both tribal and personal, is typically deep. These histories create a temporal dimension in what is otherwise only a spatial landscape. Indigenous people tend to occupy the same moral universe as the landscape they sense (1996: 11).*

Despite the beauty of Lopez's writing and his attempts to encapsulate Indigenous experience, there remains a gulf between Indigenous 'indwelling' and non-indigenous, particularly urban, experience of place. Through creative expression however, non-indigenous Australians are finding voice for their moments of emplacement that also acknowledge the pain associated with loss of place by previous dwellers.

## emplaced art works

Within the traditions of Western aesthetics, the concerns which trouble me in Australia are also being addressed by those coming from the international ecological movement.

Suzi Gablik, in *The Reenchantment of Art* talks about the 'personal breakthrough to a new way of seeing'. She is adamant that a new consciousness of participation rather than objectification must begin in order to both save the planet from ecological disaster and to reawaken our souls:

*As we begin to see the world through the lens of ecology, we also begin to reshape our view of ourselves. The holistic paradigm is bringing inner and outer - subjective and objective - worlds closer together...The 'observer' is a notion that belonged to the classical way of looking at the world. The observer could approach the world without taking part. But this is not the case with the holistic view... By changing our thinking, we can also change our experience (1991: 23).*

Gablik looks at examples of American art - 'earthworks' - where the participant is encouraged to make the transition from spectator to participant. Surrounded by the work the participant is stepping into a 'non-vicarious' world where art and landscape meld. Rather than participating vicariously, as spectator, the participant is engaged directly. Gablik cites the example of a volcanic crater in the Arizona desert used by the artist James Turrell as an observatory for astrological phenomenon. Instead of viewing a framed landscape, a visitor to this topographical feature in the wilderness is invited to participate in an experience of 'geologic time.' In another example, the composer R. Murray Schafer performs his opera, *The Princess of the Stars*, at a lake-side at dawn so that bird sounds and the earth's cycles can be incorporated into the unfolding mythopoeic story. His intention is 'to cultivate a sense of merging with a vast ecology, with a scenery that can't be controlled, in order to understand that working with nature means working on nature's terms' (1991: 88).

On a local Tasmanian level, sculptor Peter Adams makes seats placed strategically within a dramatic coastal setting on the Tasman Peninsula. Here people can sit and reflect while enjoying the beauty of the view and the sounds the surf, birds, and wind. At a national exhibition 'Sculpture by the Sea', part of which was held at Adams' property at Roaring Beach on the Tasman Peninsular, artists participated in constructing works attuned to place.<sup>38</sup>

Sieglinde Karl, in *Offering of Reconciliation and Healing*, formed a circle on the sands of Roaring Beach with materials taken from the site. Each night, before the piece was finally washed away, a fire ritual was held. 'My work', said Karl,

*grows from a deep commitment and concern for the [I]ndigenous natural environment; psychological states of mind and yearnings for spiritual fulfilment. Transient works speak of our fragile existence (catalogue statement Sculpture by the Sea 1999).*

During the same exhibition, but at another site, Port Arthur, Elizabeth Day constructed her piece, *Hover iii*, of 'washed turf and "instant" grass. Location for Day was crucial to meaning. Port Arthur is a site associated with colonial pain and recent trauma, and Day wanted her work to be 'a soothing image in a damaged space'.<sup>39</sup> It is 'unassuming', resonating through 'humility' to the convict and later emigrant history of the site, to her own immigrant status and to the displaced and transient position of its population:

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<sup>38</sup> *Sculpture by the Sea* (November 7-15), part of the Olympics Arts *Sea Change* program, was an opportunity for environmental artists to exhibit works that participate with the land in restorative and interconnected ways. By using a diversity of outside sites, including those like Port Arthur that have tragic recent and past histories and land that has been denuded by over-grazing and chemicals, these works showed the potential for healing and participation with place through environmental art.

<sup>39</sup> Port Arthur is not only the site of a convict Penal Colony but also the location of a massacre in 1996 by Martin Bryant.

*My work continues to reference abstraction, while incorporating processes and materials from the mundane and the everyday (catalogue statement *Sculpture by the Sea* 1999).*

*Hover 111*, like her earlier work *View from the 63rd floor*, does not call attention to itself. As a carpet of roots it represents impermanence, nomadism and the process of 'instability that is becoming'. Falling between categories of place and sculpture, her pieces have a temporal, improvisatory quality, cohabiting with space without possessing it through fixed territorialisation. The work also speaks to Australian outdoor space, subverting colonial space and voicing feminine desire by expressing openness and interrelatedness rather than closure (personal communication, September 1999).

These works of art are far removed from the bounded frames of landscape paintings, photographs, poems, tone poems and symphonies we have come to accept as synonymous with nature's inspiration. Gablik is proposing a reenchantment with art that signifies, by its metaphors, symbols and potential for participation, intimacy and attentiveness, a deep relationship with ecology and participation with place. Lopez calls it 'reciprocity' and 'the sense of proprioception', and admonishes his readers to 'cultivate a sense of complexity, the sense that another landscape exists beyond the one you can subject to analysis' (1996: 12). For John Beardsley, environmental artists are 'not depicting the landscape, but engaging in it; their art...[is] not simply of the landscape but in it as well' (1984: 7).

Paul Carter, in his theoretical writing, deconstructs and re-creates apprehensions of space that are not closed to interpretation.<sup>40</sup>

Muecke, while damming of Carter's intellectual gymnastics, says of this new work that it 'is about the consequences of paying attention to the way the country is shaped' (*Australian Book Review* #180, May 1996).<sup>41</sup>

Carter's radio plays such as *The Native Informant* and *Living in a New Country* are multi-media montages of human responses, bush sounds and elements of interactive installations which create intertextual 'landscapes' (to use the broadest, postmodern connotation) of the Australian environment. They are pastiches of colonial remnants and optimistic projections about place and journeying in the postcolonial imagination. 'By accentuating the onomatopoeic quality of language, Carter allows alternative meaning to be transferred through the sound of language itself....Throughout the text [of *The Native Informant*], Carter uses the notion of birds as migrants to marry sound-scape and sound-text so that song takes on rhythm and the sound of words' (interview in *Siglo* 4, 1995: 13).

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<sup>40</sup>Paul Carter's *The Lie of the Land* is structured like a journey through a meandering river valley, with tributaries and still pools here and there for the peripatetic or contemplative reader. It follows the journeys of an Australian anthropologist, a surveyor and a Venetian artist. The tracks of these men are metaphors within which to explore the idea of landscape, its meaning and its representation, and 'a historical subjectivity which... embodies a critical and creative resistance to the West's long-running assumption of its right to invade and occupy'. Carter unravels the patriarchal perception of the land and refigures a paradigm that reconnects with the ground, which is 'not as a surface but as manifold surfaces, their different amplitudes composing an environment that was uniquely local, which could not be transposed...To move over the ground is not simply to align oneself with the lie of the land; it is to be aware of a leading edge (the cone of sight) introducing perturbations into the environment' (1996: 15; 343).

<sup>41</sup>Stephen Muecke has little positive to say about Carter's contribution to Land Rights and postcoloniality or the 'emancipatory potential of poetry' ('The World According to Carter' in *Australian Book Review* #180, May 1996). Reading Carter two years later, I am inclined to agree with Muecke when he says that the phenomenological basis is rather more nineteenth century German in origin rather than poststructuralist French and so rather a Romantic evocation of the three 'explorations' he conflates. From a feminist point of view, it could be argued that it continues the emphasis on male exploration and European traditions of art.

In these art works the self-construct is being brought into an intense expression of the relationship with the object of creativity. Artists express the need to walk the ground, feel the earth and let it enfold the traveller and teach its secrets which are beyond the perimeters of framing and gallery strolls. These pathways may then lead to aesthetic re-experiencing but may not be primarily prescribed by that aesthetic way of knowing but by a sense of interdependence that is a dance between the human and non-human world.

### finding and making music

How then do I, a white woman living in neo-colonial Australia for whom Aboriginal indwelling is an example rather than an option, make music in this place?

Having been raised in a fundamentalist tradition and educated in Classical music, I retain a residue-resonance to structures. Yet a resentment towards their imprisonment feeds a desire to know the moment-of-being that is repressed in fundamentalism and formality. This desire is playful, joyous, interactive, open and pleasurable, features absent from any rigid, dualistic, closed discourse. That this impulse resonates with metaphors of female desire is not surprising.

I was initiated into a belief system which was perceived as essential to life after death. It insisted that all thoughts, actions, morals, percepts, interactions and beliefs were at the mercy of a 'conversion ethic' cemented in a closed hierarchy of patriarchal binarisms. This

ideology condoned coloniality, in the guise of progress and missionary goals, and perpetuated a patriarchy where women could give voice only in oppressive conditions, under judgement from male overseers or in segregated activities. This system did not acknowledge Indigenes' belonging to land or ecological responsibility: after all, land degradation and dispossession signified the inevitability of a new millennium where the 'Rapture' would create a garden for believers and a cesspit for the unfaithful. Music sustained me, yet it was a music of formalist traditions where the only scope for freedom-in-the-moment was exploring the gaps between sounds, as harmony, or improvising melodic lines to the existing structures.<sup>42</sup>

I studied Eastern religions and psychology and made links with the Quakers and the radical wing of the Catholic church. My love of bushwalking led me away from suburbia to retreat in 'the bush' in Southern Tasmania, at the full stop of a road in the folds of a valley lined with silver wattles. And then later, time near the sea before, for convenience, a return to urban living.

The process of finding self and a belonging-place is a ceaseless quest. Living on an island-home where a whole nation was dispossessed of its relational world reminds me of the frailty of belonging and of the fragility of those ghettoised and displaced by colonial power. Music and a residual sense of the numinous gives me a language of connection to the deeper, unknowable world while improvisatory

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<sup>42</sup>Ironically, the music of the Baptist church in which I grew up was deeply rooted in American Southern Gospel traditions. The songs were an odd assortment of African slave songs and hymns from the Northern European Protestant traditions stuck fast in Classical formalist structures.



practice tunes me to the exploratory and unconstrained impulses that I find so intoxicating.

Sense of the sacred is in process, shaped by the *habitus* and the places I inhabit. I thirst for emplacement, for an iconography that feeds my sense of female-self and expresses desire that springs from that self sense.

deeper (ecology) magic

Joanna Macy's model provides some tools for rejuvenation that vibrate with my sense of the numinous, emplacement and improvisation. On the basis of her Buddhist knowledge, she encourages people to work phenomenologically in order to recover a sense of attunement amidst the despair over the world-wide ecological crises,

*[to] begin with our own experience for that is what we know first hand. The Buddha summoned people to do just that: to rely on the authority of their own experience. "Ehipassiko," he said, "Come see for yourself." In our collective situation today, with its almost overwhelming social and environmental crises, trusting our own experience means acknowledging our deep, inner resources, our anguish for the world (1991: x).*

Macy's idea of 'dependent co-arising', the 'elegant' way of understanding the dynamics of interdependent power, is a way of 'acknowledging the depths and reaches of our own inner experience', so that we may come to the discovery of who we are, and discover compassion (bodhisattva). 'In this fluid tapestry of space-time, there is at root no distinction between self and other' (1991: 32, 45).

Macy's Deep Ecology<sup>43</sup> is an intersection of Buddhism, ecofeminism (which she avoids naming) and systems theory. Systems theory, she suggests, gives us a conceptual tool to understand the interaction between known and knower.<sup>44</sup> The loops of codes and constructs are equivalent to the Buddhist notion of *sankhara*, 'volitional formations or impulses' but also to the *habitus*, the embodied memories of the past circulating in present experience. They influence every moment of living existence, they are formed by experience and modified by experience. Through positive and negative feedback the systems search for new codes to reorganise themselves. And so living systems adapt, transform and learn, acknowledging the force of being-in-process. Macy suggests that the Gaia hypothesis<sup>45</sup> is 'a comparable transformation in our understanding of our world and ourselves' (1991: 70) and that the model of Tara, a feminine figuration in many mythologies, can act as a resonating metaphor to this concept.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Warwick Fox articulates three cornerstones from Naess's ecophilosophy: 'popular' (ecocentric approach to ecology and living in the world); 'formal' (predicated on the idea of asking deeper and deeper questions about ecological relationships to which we belong); 'philosophical' (self-realisation in the path of Spinoza and Ghandi - an expansive a sense of self as possible) (see *Island* #38: 35).

<sup>44</sup>'Monitoring' is the key term in systems theory, and it is the way whereby cognitive systems, our minds included, organise themselves through feedback loops. This is 'naturally occurring mindfulness' (eg, blood or oceans self-regulate). Loops of knowing are created: 'the memories, expectations, and habits...from the past infuse and give shape to our perceptions' (1993: 68,69).

<sup>45</sup>'The Gaia hypothesis', developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, denotes the whole cosmology as a being. '[These observations] led us to the formulation of the proposition that living matter, the air, the sea, the pH of the soil and so on so as to be optimum for survival of the biosphere. The system seemed to exhibit the behaviour of a single organism, even a living creature. One having such formidable powers deserved a name to match it...Gaia - the name given by the ancient Greeks to their Earth goddess' (in J. Gribbin 1975: 5). While the generic 'she' is used to describe this entity, the sense is of a being in process rather than an object under the lens.

<sup>46</sup>Tara is an Indo-European name of the Goddess Earth, known from India to Ireland. In Tibetan Buddhism she takes on a non-dualistic aspect of the self-other. Tara meditation practice is specifically for healing and Tibetan Buddhist nuns have a special reputation for perpetuating this ritual (see Kabilsingh 1991: 102). Macy suggests that Tara, along with Kwanyin (Kali, or yin) is a later manifestation of the Mother of all Buddhas, 'empty of preconception, pregnant point of potential action, beholding the teeming world with a vision she transfigures' (1993: 113).

Looking to a model that is feminine but beyond earth-bound narratives does not harmonize with the current fad of desert spirituality in Australia. This ideology continues a tradition of the 'journey to the centre' in literature that has its roots in the Romantic notions of the sublime and in the Biblical narratives of wilderness. While there are exceptions to this paradigm, recent popularist models have highlighted its power and presence in the Australian imagination.<sup>47</sup> For women, this metaphor offers little comfort or inspiration as it is constructed on models of masculinist desire.

Eugene Stockton, Catholic priest, for example says in *Landmarks: A Spiritual Search in a Southern Land*, that 'the traveller leaves behind the familiar cityscape',

*with its massed buildings and fenced homes, all looking so safe and secure. He faces a land of vast expanses and uncharted ways, offering space to grow and move. It calls to freedom, but demands decision at every step: 'Which way? How?' Freely made, the choices are his as he takes responsibility for his way (1990: 20).*

Similarly, Michael Goonan, another Catholic priest, extends the generic 'he' to include the first person plural when he draws this conclusion from Thomas Keneally's *Woman of the Inner Sea*:

*People...who have the courage to journey to the interior will find a sea of life-giving water [for]...'it is here that a person is open to the transcendent dimension, it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality' (1996: 106).*

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<sup>47</sup>David Tacey's *Edge of Sacred* (North Blackburn: HarperCollins 1993) applies Jungian archetypal theory to claims for a move towards the centre as a way of maturation. He refers to the writings of Les Murray and D. H. Lawrence to support his theory.

The interior for these male writers is a metaphorical space of freedom, renewal, growth and discovery of self. In recent popularist appropriations 'Aboriginality' has been referred to as something to be included in this vision of spiritual awakening.<sup>48</sup> Female writers too find solace in these metaphors and often seem blind to the intensity of masculinist imagery implicit within these narratives. Roslynn Haynes recent book *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature and Film* (1999), while it is to be praised for its comprehensive coverage of the 'interior' in the national imagination and inclusion of her own personal journey (albeit marginalised into the preface), it has little to say about women-in-the-desert and their representations of experience, 'rehearsing [instead] those same tropes [of the explorer] yet again in the organisation of the narrative' (Alison Bartlett in *Women-Church* #25, 1999: 39). Acclaimed academic and activist Veronica Brady also has difficulty inventing a narrative that is not inflected with dualisms, patriarchy, and figurations of penetration. She strongly endorses Jungian and patriarchal Biblical duality when she says:

*But here in Australia, at what might be one of the extremes of Western Christendom, this experience of the desert reopens the question – if we are prepared to take it. The God of the desert is the God who shows himself in this mysterious landscape beyond anything we can conceive of or control, who goes before us calling us into his mystery, challenging all words and thoughts about him* (1994: 266).

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<sup>48</sup>Tacey's 'goodwill' towards Aboriginal culture borders on appropriation with his generalist claim that 'if land rights and Indigenous custodianship is going to stick...we have to move beyond the patronising pretence of saying "oh yes, the land is your mother, and therefore it must be important to you", and instead place ourselves in the Aboriginal position, viewing the world the way our [I]ndigenous people see it' (in M. Griffiths and J. Tulip (eds) 1999: 76). My belief is that Aboriginal reconciliation is a *process* of understanding that has many layers both for Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Conceptualising these claims by way of resisting them from a feminist theologian's point of view, Elaine Lindsay says:

*...the meaning of all our meanings is located somewhere near ULURU and the quintessential Australian spiritual journey is figured as a pilgrimage to the centre. If the pilgrim is lucky, the land will adopt a motherly mien and lead him rejoicing to the Father; usually he will have to wrestle the barren land, finding God through struggle and hardship. The imagery that is most often employed is that of the desert (1994: 20).*

The pilgrimage has become a metaphor for ecotourism, a concept set well in motion by Bruce Chatwin's story of a search for the authentic nomadic life in the Australian desert. Chatwin's representation of Benedictine Fathers reinforces the tradition of the hermit in the wilderness finding solace (God) through 'struggle and hardship' (1987: 54-60). Searching for a way of finding renewal, British writer Monica Furlong turned to Chatwin's *The Songlines* for a travelogue that would guide the journey that she describes in her book *Flight of the Kingfisher: Journey among the Kukatja Aborigines*. Reflecting on the impulse to make the journey she says:

*It was not...the tragedy, terrible as it was, that drew me to Australia, but a wish to know and understand more of the human reality and the spiritual depth still visible in the peoples of those extraordinary deserts and forests. I read and re-read Bruce Chatwin's description of the Dreaming in 'The Songlines' (1996: 18).*

Chatwin is read by Furlong and other seekers of an idealised Antipodean centre as an interpreter or mediator of Aboriginality as well as an envoy of nomadism that is inflected with a noble sense of sacrality. Furlong wanted an 'untouched' experience to feed her already stretched imagination. While I am skeptical of Chatwin's

widespread influence, especially as his writing reeks of neo-colonialist attitudes, and critical of Furlong's naivety in adopting them, her compassion and sense of the sacred-in-place finally outweighs his authority and condescension and gives her story some personal authenticity. Unlike Chatwin, she remains in one place, at a Catholic mission, and attempts to come to terms with the degradation within the community through her own deep experience. Here she feels restored by the sense of spirituality that the land on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert gives her and through the stories and rituals of the Kukatja people. The experience is deepened through participating in the lives of those at Wirrumanu, not by a mythical pilgrimage to a central icon, living in isolation in a 'barren land', or by attempting to recreate nomadism in European terms.<sup>49</sup>

If 'home is a nomadic place, an unfinished place of variable boundaries, but a belonging-place nevertheless' as Bigwood claims, to conflate nomadism as a way of travelling for the European with the nomadic life for Indigenous people is to misunderstand the complexity of place and belonging in both white settler and Aboriginal experience.

Nomadism for Indigenous people is a way of life in which frequent returns to known places and people - rather than exploring new ones - and caretaking the country with which they have totemic relationship, are essential and integrated. As Philip Goodchild, commenting on Deleuze's concept of nomadology, observes:

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<sup>49</sup>'Luurnpa', the kingfisher, is the totemic ancestor of the Kukatja people. The Aboriginal name for Balgo [in the Kimberley district of Western Australia] is Wirrumanu. Wirrumanu is the name of the track made by the 'luurnpa' in the Dreaming when he led the people from waterhole to waterhole' (Furlong 1996: i).

*Nomads are deterritorialized: the space in which they dwell does not have any fixed points, lines or boundaries, but is a smooth space, like a desert with shifting dunes (1996: 37).*

Indigenous 'indwelling' of country can be a clue to finding a deeper sense of 'shifting' place as sacred in the urban or rural place for non-indigenous Australians although 'emplacement' will never reach the experiential and existential depths of 'indwelling'. Gelder and Jacobs' suggestion that Aboriginal sacred-place is nomadic or 'all-over-the-place' may assist non-indigenous Australians so that there can be an echo to this way-of-being, achieved *where we are* and through attunement to the process of inscribing it for ourselves with some depth of meaning. This is a new/old mythology that resonates particularly for the lived experience of women who often move from place to place and become 'displaced' by circumstances beyond their control.

Describing the sense of 'indwelling' that for Indigenous experience is 'country', Deborah Bird Rose says:

*From my studies of Aboriginal people I have developed a definition of country which starts with the idea that country, to use the philosopher's term, is a nourishing terrain. (Levinas). Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived and lived with. Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. ...Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart's ease...*

*Country is multi-dimensional - it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and*

*waters, surface water and air. There is sea country and land country; in some areas people talk about sky country* (1996: 7,8).

## homing-in

Non-indigenous women also need experience of resonance to country in their own place, whether in the centre of the desert, in the mountains of the Divide, in towns on the coastal fringe or in inner city dwelling-places. Lindsay, in uncovering the Australian novelist Barbara Hanrahan's diaries, suggests a way of being-in-place for white settlers that comes from joy in gardens, fecundity, and a delight in the goodness of living, all 'part of an alternative and too long unrecognised theology, a theology of settled areas which has grown out of the first-hand experience of women' (in M. Joy & P. Magee (eds) 1994: 32).<sup>50</sup> In *Iris in her Garden*, Hanrahan wrote of 'pink roses everywhere',

*roses raining from a blue summer sky, and a green beanstalk man reaching down with his leafy green fingers and snatching my grandmother away. Puffballs of Father Christmas thistles, poppies spilling their black birth dust. My grandmother's legs float higher; they're patterned with veins and the stems of an unnatural garden: witch bell, star flower. She is a giant earth mother in the sky; she is the girl she used to be. Black shiny hair full of diamond-bright sun sparks, threaded satin ribbon; sleepy almond eyes, forget-me-not blue; all the wrinkles gone away and she's the goddess of the rainbow. She floats, she dissolves* (1991: 59).

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<sup>50</sup> As Alison Barlett also points out, recent fictions by Australian women writers have figured women's experience of the desert as different from 'exploration tropes' inherent in masculinist narratives, even when a surface reading may suggest the latter (in *Women-Church* #25, 1999). See for example Eva Sallis *Hiam* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin 1998); Helen Garner *The Last Days of Chez Nous & Two Friends* (Ringwood: McPhee/Gribble/Penguin 1992); Nikki Gemmell *Cleave* (Milsons Point: Verso/Random House 1998).



In this lived experience of emplacement that Hanrahan evokes, an imaginal world full of vibrancy and momentarily richness lifts and revives the mundane. Tuning to this world is a recognition of the improvisatory impulses that generate being-in-the-world.

In the search for a truth that generates and speaks from a sense of belonging, women need a model of community, nurture and 'in-the-bodiness', as Jane Duran calls it (1995: 166), that challenges the colonial and Modern edifice laced with masculinist representations that do not represent women's experience of journeying and belonging. To re-create a richer way of knowing and being we need to decode representations of land and exploration metaphors and question psychoanalytic and linguistic models that have been the territories of male (and therefore by default, generic) ideology and desire for centuries.

An intertextual language that is postmodern, in the best sense, and liminal, is evolving, telling the stories of women and the significance of place to their evolution of self. Joanna Macy puts it this way:

*The skill in means (upaya), by which the bodhisattava responds and acts within the realm of contingency and need is seen as essential to his [her] enlightenment. Upaya, the readiness to reach out and improvise, is the other face of wisdom (1991: 113).*

We have 'an innate drive to create wholeness out of our manifest experience in the form of stories and to express that wholeness to others', writes Gabrielle Lusser Rico (1996: 22). In whatever art form we wish to validate our experience, a narratology seeks to answer questions of identity and allows us to, as Jean Troy-Smith says,

'immerse ourselves in the most profound of all intertextualities: the web of life' (1996: 23). Freya Matthews observes that the 'relational self is constituted by... a nexus within a wider web [that constitutes] the whole, [so that operating with a sense of] relationality facilitates open-ness to the possibility of intersubjective engagement with the natural world' (1995: 83). This web, for me, is a cacophony of resonances that 'become refrain' in the moment of experiencing and conversation. The 'readiness to reach out and improvise' is, at its most intimate, an attunement to the moment of experiencing place along the nomadic route and in the liminal space, a space with many places that is always in process. Such readiness, as 'the other face of wisdom', replicates and resounds to the cacophony that is the vibrating presence of Gaia.

**sounding 2**

**improvisation: a way of being t/here**

## sounding 2

### improvisation: a way of being t/here

*The musical image has much to offer in reorganising our thinking in nonlinear and multiple directions. Improvisation is an apt metaphor for more flexible social thinking (Ingrid Monson 1996: 215).*

### musings on improvisation

This dissertation, a nexus of improvisation and ecology within a feminist aesthetic, is an attempt to sound the depths of the process of creativity and the intensity of 'the force of thinking while doing' and playing.<sup>1</sup> The tenor of improvisation is as cacophonous and playful as the biophysical world, so that the sonorities expressed are diverse and always changing. This is the *palim-plus*, the space of becoming.

### improvisation - code or mode?

Coding improvisatory practices, whether they are responses to bird calls, dots and stems on blank manuscript, sentences on a page, dance steps on stage or recordings of improvised events for armchair listening, is a contradiction in terms. We improvise all the time but as an art form improvisation is an elusive concept because while it exists at the level of intentionality in all creative acts it is not brought into awareness unless the participant acknowledges that

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<sup>1</sup>Derrida says that '[f]reeplay is the disruption of presence', [the presence being] 'substitutive reference' which, rather than being fixed direct references, should be open to interpretation, difference and play (1972: 247-65).

intention as an impulse. As Brian Brown observes, improvisation is a 'synthesis of languages, musical experiences and expressions [within the] process of creating an environment leading to self-discovery, non-dependence, artistic perspective and personal expression' (in *Sounds Australian* Vol 14.48, 1996: 24).

The unpopularity of improvisation as a mode of production in 'high-art' circles and an unwillingness by many artists working self-consciously in that mode to speak about their experiences and creative process has helped to keep the practice to the periphery of theoretical discourse. Discussion amongst musicians is often deflected to abstract terms and intuitive responses. Predicted improvisations rarely come off as forecast by the participants, and retrospectively the events are recalled in experiential rather than theoretical terms. This gap in theoretical concerns reflects improvisatory practice's intuitive sense and its momentarily enactment of performativity, dialogic expression and personal process, all of which can be suffocated under verbal description.

Improvisation is also often shrouded in mystery. Improvising musicians are hesitant to describe the process or deploy the term for fear of losing its impulse and as Derek Bailey, an improviser who based his book *Improvisation* on interviews with improvisers, says,

*there is a noticeable reluctance to use the word and some improvisers express a positive dislike for it. I think this is due to its widely accepted connotations which imply that improvisation is something without preparation and without consideration, a completely ad hoc activity, frivolous and inconsequential, lacking in design and method* (1980: 5).

The mystique surrounding improvisation is in part due to cultural misunderstanding created by the paucity of descriptive language, and the depth of commitment to the practice may result from a determination to bypass or subvert conventions that define traditions of creative expression. Bailey, basing his premise on improvisers' honest expressions, says that:

*improvisers know there is no musical activity which requires greater skill and devotion, preparation, training and commitment. And so they resent the word, which in some places has almost become a term of abuse...and completely misrepresents the depth and complexity of their work (1980: 5).*

If, as Bailey suggests, improvisation is the 'least understood and most widely practised' form of artistic expression (1980: 1), and if attempting to enlarge the boundaries of its meaning misrepresents the spirit of the practice,<sup>2</sup> then isolating meaning to an all-encompassing definition is also impossible. Improvisatory impulses are always in flux. They have the capacity to be deeply embedded in and representative of the moment from which they emerge as well as to voice past associations and experiences. At a deep level of phenomenological experiencing, improvisation is expressive of the *habitus* and it is therefore no wonder that it is shrouded in a language of resistance.

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<sup>2</sup>Just as 'nature' signifies many things so too does 'improvisation.' Bruscia says that 'in everyday language "improvising" means to make something up as one goes along or, as Webster's dictionary puts it, "to make, invent, or arrange off hand". In certain situations, it can also mean to create or fabricate something from whatever resources are available. In music, "improvising" is defined as "the art of spontaneously creating music (ex tempore) while playing, rather than performing a composition already written"' (quoting Apel & Daniel 1969). Drawing on the music therapy model, Bruscia suggests improvisation encompasses all the aforementioned elements and that it is a 'process' (1987: 5).

But how does improvisation serve the creative impulse? Ingrid Monson, using the African-American jazz model, one of the most subversive forms extant, concludes:

*while 'intentionless invention' (drawing upon the accumulated social experience of a lifetime) is certainly one aspect of the improvisational process, there is...great interplay between conscious and unconscious modes of awareness in jazz improvisation and several layers whose degrees of fixity and freedom are constantly shifting (1996: 214).*

Bailey assures us that these shifting layers of experience and expression align themselves with the model of 'procedure of variation' (1980: 29), which, as a form of expression, is the oldest and most persistent performing principle 'without serious intention', whether as embellishment or as a means in itself. Improvisation is 'a powerful force in creation of new forms' (Ferand quoted in Bailey 1980: 2)<sup>3</sup> and, in Classical or 'serious art music', the most formalist of all musics, it could be argued that each new phase formalises fragments or mutations of improvised explorations.<sup>4</sup> Historically, as structures became more important than the sounds themselves, improvisation declined in popularity.

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<sup>3</sup>Bailey says that 'idiomatic improvisation, much the most widely used, is mainly concerned with the expression of an idiom - such as jazz, flamenco or baroque - and takes its identity and motivation from that idiom. Non-idiomatic improvisation has other concerns and is most usually found in so-called 'free' improvisation' (1980: 4).

<sup>4</sup>For example, Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart all improvised in performance and while composing. The form 'Variations on a Theme' or 'Air with Variations', is a set of formalised extemporisations on a melodic 'Subject' that has been viable since the 16th century. Baroque music was highly ornamented, a style which gave performers room to invent notes to fill the silences created by the percussive sounds of the harpsichord. These flourishes later became part of the canon (see Herbert Weinstock 1968: 60-64; 162-165).

## idiomatic or non-idiomatic form

But the definitions and descriptions of improvisatory practice still extant are largely those of idiomatic forms, such as jazz, Indian ragas and Persian musics.<sup>5</sup> Musicologists and students, appropriating or documenting these styles, have tended to define them as idiomatic regimes representing specific 'sonic sites'. A form of imperialism is often evident, demonstrated by the need to define styles by locations and represent them in the journals, recordings and photographs of the white middleclass traveller to remote places who desires an authentic, often 'hyperbolic' experience of monoculturism. Chloe Chard, historian of British travel writing, says of the tourist:

*By selecting objects of commentary that bear the imprint both of the antique and of a version of the feminine, then, the traveller is able to affirm with double insistence that the topography does in fact offer the mysterious otherness that is expected and demanded of it while at the same time also registering - again with double emphasis - that this topography positively invites an effort of appropriation (1998: 5).*

This topographic sensibility applies equally to the musicologist, who, in attempting to keep the form pure, has emphasised the idiomatic elements rather than the less sedimented, non-idiomatic resonances echoing in the form. Modes, rhythmic motifs and repeating gestures are concretised and recorded while the impulse to create sonorities in the moment of playing are often passed over.

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<sup>5</sup>An important exception is Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's recent text, *Improvisation, Hyper-media and the Arts since 1945* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), which documents with great detail diverse forms of word, sound and sound-word improvisations.



In the film *Gadjo Dilo* (New Vision Release 1998), Gypsy culture is exposed through the ears and eyes of a visiting Parisian musicologist. Gypsy music for many signifies freedom of movement and colourful textures yet as this film demonstrates, it is fundamentally an expression of lived experience, whether it be grief, pain or pleasure. When the musicologist, himself an urban Gypsy, comes to terms with the agony of the outcast existence for the Romanian Gypsies he has come to study, he destroys the tapes of their songs. His memories of deeper experiences - being with them, dancing and singing together and growing into relationships - are the only souvenirs he takes home with him. Borrowing is rarely appropriate unless sharing takes place without an imperialistic sub-text of appropriation.

As this example shows, while idiomatic improvisatory forms often appear place specific, they also present the listener with deeper experiences. Romanian Gypsy songs sound similar to Klezmer tunes on the streets of New York through related modal constructions and African chants have a 'feel' that is reminiscent of Rock music.<sup>6</sup> Musics reflect the place they come from but the resonance to other idioms suggests that the forms, even those with an embedded Classical structure like Indian ragas, are not place exclusive and that sounds and life experiences travel very well. To 'collect' and 'define' them only by those places of origin is to negate the force or 'thick description' from which they began and with which they persist, and,

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<sup>6</sup>There is not space here to venture into the territory of 'popular musics', music that needs to be analysed within social and cultural contexts. It could be argued however that all musics, except for serious art-music under discussion here, are popular in the sense that they represent subcultures and express social, political and economic interactions. Improvisation is a link between popular music and art-musics, as it expresses lived experience but enlarges and deconstructs formalist conventions. (For a general text on popular music see Marcus Breen (ed) *Missing in Action: Australian Popular Music in Perspective* Melbourne: Verbal Graphics, 1987).

to reduce the osmotic transference that comes from cross-cultural exchange.<sup>7</sup> Improvisation, as a cultural activity and mutating impulse, shifts between idiomatic and non-idiomatic gestures just as styles merge with one another over time from place to place.<sup>8</sup>

## intuition

If improvisation is an intuitive set of intention and intentionless events which is constantly shifting and evolving in time and space, at whatever level of form intuition rather than replication steers the improvised component of the musics, production takes place from a sense of becoming, from the generative force inherent in the lived experience of the spatio-temporal dimension. So what then is 'intuition' for the improviser and how does it generate improvisatory impulses?

Jeff Pressing suggests that there is a vast literature on the concept of intuition yet little expansion of it within studies on improvisation, even though many musicians and music educators, myself included, frequently use the term to describe their sense of the experience. Intuition is a pathway to direct contact with 'prime reality [as an] evolving flux':

*The prime reality is referred to as 'the perpetual happening' or 'duration'. The mind of man, according to Bergson, is shielded*

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<sup>7</sup>Clifford Geertz uses the term 'thick description' to identify the features of cultural experience that relate to specific activities within society. Music is an example of an activity that draws on some of the deepest meanings of social life, whether it is urban youth culture or traditional Indigenous culture (1993: 19).

<sup>8</sup>This is not to negate the importance of monocultural musics to nation identity but to emphasise that ethnomusicologists often miss the deeper and evolving impulses while searching for fixed descriptions.

*from the perpetual happening by the intellect, which imposes 'patterned immobility' on prime reality, distorting, immobilizing, and separating it into discrete objects, events and processes. In the perpetual happening itself, all events, objects and processes are unified (in Sloboda 1988: 148).<sup>9</sup>*

Intellect and intuition can freely interact in this 'perpetual happening' to 'develop an enriched perspective, [so that] tapping the prime reality is similar to the improviser's aesthetic of tapping the flow of the music'. Intuition draws on cues, associations, memories and bodily experience that are normally put aside or suppressed (1988: 148,149).

From his positivistic study of the intuitive aspects of improvisation, Pressing raises several perspectives on improvisation which throw light on this region of creativity. He firstly emphasises 'the intuitive perspective [demonstrating that]',

*the individual acts best when he or she merely taps a certain powerful source of musical action in a naturally correct fashion, one that may not be analysable or predictable in physical or musical terms. Although this perspective is usually transpersonal and may seem romantic to some, this does not imply that it is untestable and therefore unscientific.*

*A second perspective is to assume that the residual decision-making actually reflects the effects of individual free will. In other words, the improviser is a unique conscious entity, and residual decision-making rests to some degree on internal variables not predictable even in principle from a fully detailed*

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<sup>9</sup>Pressing quotes Westcott's three historical approaches to the philosophies of intuition. These are: 1. 'Classical Intuition' (Spinoza, Croce, Bergson) where intuition is 'a glimpse of truth unclouded by...reason...or instinct. Knowledge is unique, immediate, personal and unverifiable. 2. 'Contemporary Intuitionism' (Stocks 1939, Ewing 1941, Bahm 1960) where there is immediate apprehension of basic truths (such as deduction, mathematical axioms, causality) which stand outside logic...yet belong to logic and reason. 3. 'Positivistic Intuition' (Bunge 1962), 'a rapid inference which produces a hypothesis' (see Pressing in Sloboda 1988: 147-8).

*knowledge of the physical-state variables of the improviser and his or her environment.*

*A third perspective is the physicalist one...[where] the complex decision-making is seen to be an emergent property of the fantastically complex physical system known as the human being, in interaction with a series of environments.*

*Fourth...is the perspective of randomness [where] unconstrained residual decision making is simply modelled by use of random generators. As the improviser becomes more and more expert through practise and more and more control procedures are built up, random processes need to be invoked less...approaching a minimum threshold (1988: 165).*

What Pressing's study shows in these elements of intuition, free will, environment and randomness, is the deep connection improvisation has with the unconscious or 'untold' self and that with practise/practice the intuitive intention becomes more embodied and 'told' in the practitioner. His study also underwrites the 'environmental' element of improvisation. That is, it 'takes place' as an interactive process within a 'series of environments' as an awareness of being in process. But how does the participant, giving voice to random, intuitive and uniquely individual productions, move from self to the space of intersubjectivity?

conversing

Monson calls improvisation 'a dialogue', or 'the phenomenological discursivity of music...[that] has much to do with the creation of emotion through music' (1996: 210). She speaks of jazz, which, like Gospel, has become a signifier of the music of communities in the Eastern and Southern states of America and for displaced African

communities attempting to repossess community through song. Her study documents the relational space which improvisers inhabit and affirms the function music has as a cultural, personal and intuitive tool for communication.

Although jazz has been an African slave phenomenon, more recently it has been appropriated, borrowed and shared by white musicians who have, in turn, contributed to its force while reducing it to a structured form through analysis, notation and tradition.<sup>10</sup> But in whatever form it appears, improvisation cannot be isolated from its location, whether as ethno-musicological study, emotional statement, recording process or individual act. Place, belonging and connection interpenetrate all phenomenal events. Improvisation, as a dialogue, is at best inclusive, dialectic and non-marginalising in this sense. As Simon Frith asserts, '[m]usic constructs our sense of identity through direct experiences it offers the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives' (1996: 127).

In the broader territory of non-idiomatic styles the dearth of studies on improvisation (with the exception of Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's recent (1997) overview *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts since 1945*) poses obstacles to research based on musical scholarship.

Pressing's psychological study however on the cognitive processes of improvisation is useful to a broad approach as it suggests that 'self-

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<sup>10</sup>Marcus Breen suggests that 'the music called jazz has been thoroughly coopted by middle class people as a leisure pursuit, not as an expression of the life of an oppressed community, as it was when it began in America in the 1920s....The original impulse of anger and freedom as seen in the jazz of American negroes has been thoroughly subverted by material interests. Nevertheless, jazz is still a form of music whose music has a conscience, because it is always the music of black America in Australia' (1987: 99).

realisation', through improvisation, is the deeply creative, intuitive and spiritual intentioned or intentionless moment which has the potential to be free from reductive rules.<sup>11</sup> Improvisation has been a vehicle for 'consciousness expansion and the tapping of deep intuitions' which he says, as a 'transpersonal' approach, goes back 'thousands of years to the sacred texts of many religions'.<sup>12</sup> This mode of improvisation is almost exclusively vocal, since the voice is considered to be the 'primal instrument.' Vocalisation is the closest instrument for uncovering personal meaning and for conversation, as the impulses require no intermediary for revelation of sounds: the voice is self and the self is voice, or body. The voice is the most intuitive instrument because it not only represents the *habitus* but it is the *habitus*, the morphology of previously intuited events.

## singing texts and the gaze

In the context of the land as text-body, the voice is the primal land-resonator and in the evolution of musical instrumentation many

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<sup>11</sup>Pressing says that few of the many Western teaching texts on improvisation have cognitive insights useful in model building and most are concerned with jazz (a small related number with blues and rock) or keyboard (particularly French-tradition organ) improvisation. Pressing observes five teaching perspectives on improvisation:

1. Improvisation as real-time composition: exemplified by Baroque embellishment, basic variation and traditional approaches.
2. Patterns and models: figured bass and embellishments of set pieces common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and jazz riffs.
3. Setting of constraints and improvisational problems: an expressive individuality nurtured by interactive exercises with a teacher.
4. Multiple versions: the student enlarges the original. This 'imitative self-discovery approach' is found in the Persian *radif* and in the Ghanaian tradition as well as in modern approaches to jazz and blues.

5. Self-realization: performance is propelled by developing the students' powers of sensation, imagination and memory (in Sloboda (ed) 1988: 143).

<sup>12</sup>Pressing records Hamel (1979), Laneri (1975), Oliveros (1971), Gaburo (1968), Pressing (1980) and Galas (1982) as examples of research and instruction which feature synchronicity and introversion (1988: 142).

acoustics sought to echo the human voice. From my work with community choirs - where no previous musical experience is necessary - I discovered that once the initial embarrassment of hearing one's voice is removed, the sense of interconnection is so strong that participants leave in a state close to euphoria. This experience is heightened when printed notation is not used and when a free form of improvisation is encouraged.

For African-Americans oppressed by the formalist traditions of protestantism, improvisation was and still is a means to subvert form and strict regime. The voice of slavery expressed in the plantations, churches and streets of America led to the blues scale, the fundamental mode of jazz musics which has, ironically, become formalised in several idiomatic modes.

But ironically 'Jazz Studies' has gained currency within academic and musical quarters by producing recent studies which, rather than conceptualising the depth and intensity of psychological process and dialogue, theorise about the cultural significance of improvisation as well as coding the core of rules necessary to play the game.<sup>13</sup> And on a wider level, improvisation in the diverse field of 'Cultural Studies' is a 'metaphor for hybridity, for the blurriness of boundaries, and for the liberation from the inhibiting confines of both hegemonic ideologies and structuralism' (Monson 1996: 214). These idiomatic and theoretical studies fail to acknowledge the multiplicity of layers in improvisatory practice and the space between the dichotomies that

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<sup>13</sup>Monson's *Saying Something* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996) and Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz...* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994) represent milestones in postcolonial jazz studies by taking an 'inside' approach to the art rather than one of detached fascination.

they are attempting to define. The inherent danger within such (postcolonial?) discourses is that they perpetuate the 'gaze' of coloniality, claiming to 'speak for' persons other than oneself. As Monson says, '[f]or every contribution of musical detail and understanding',

*one can find a glib and superficial cultural explanation that reproduces and reinforces the most recurrent and virulent racial stereotypes of African American communities. Many musicians resent the presumption of authority on the part of the critics who may have no real musical knowledge themselves. Others resent the voyeuristic quality of the gaze that emphasizes the social transgressions of musicians (especially sexual and drug-related ones) at the expense of their broader and frequently more mundane humanity (1996: 6).*

Monson places herself within the community as a participating conversationalist, a non-African-American-jazz player who is competent to 'say something', as the title of her book suggests, rather than to stare, record and theorize. It is this liminal space of being, knowing and connecting that I am attempting to understand and re-present in this thesis, particularly in relation to my own experiencing. Monson is right when she says that 'no patronising gesture of downward mobility or ideological position can ever erase the institutional and social configurations of status and prestige in which anyone with the hubris to write books [or theses] participates' (1996: 6).

music or noise?

One academic and interdisciplinary study however which is appropriate here because it attempts a post-Marxist position on music as a



cultural product, is Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. This is a socio-historical rendering which proposes that music not only reflects society but that it also foreshadows new social formations in a prophetic way. He makes some pertinent observations on 'composition' as a generic term and suggests a return to its real meaning, 'to put together'.

Susan McClary, feminist musicologist, commenting in the 'Afterword' to Attali's book on the inclusiveness of his premise, says:

*It is this demystified yet humanly dignified activity that Attali wishes to remove from the rigid institutions of specialized musical training in order to return it to all members of society (1989: 157).*

Attali suggests that the traditions of using language and mathematics for economic and social theorising are no longer enough and that music, 'the organisation of noise', serves as a prophetic indicator by virtue of both its compositional procedures (channelling noise) and its modes of producing, distributing and consuming music.<sup>14</sup> While it could be argued that his work is idealistic and not coming from within the art he critiques, Attali's idea that composition has the potential to 'prefigure a free and decentralized society' by the process of people 'making music for themselves', is relevant to my study of an intertext of improvisation, women's music and nature (1989: 19). It is through the moment of improvisatory practice as metaphor for the emerging and evolving self and its potential for interconnectedness, and through the inspiration from nature for the

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<sup>14</sup>Attali suggests four overlapping stages in the reciprocal relation between the political economy and music: *sacrifice* (ritual practices of sacred societies); *representation* (professional music-making as a marketable object in performance); *repetition* (recording music so that it is offered in 'endless repetition' and secondary to performance); and *composition* (making music) (1989: 18-20).

composing impulse, that this potential for inclusiveness can be realised. For women composer-improvisers, 'making music for themselves' is central to being free from the dominance of canonical forms. As a process of intuitive production, even re-production, improvisatory practice can be a vehicle for expression of political, emotional and ecological intentions. As a socialist imperative, Attali's model encourages deep layers of dialogic participation, becoming and process-awareness that can affirm feminine narratives of desire and production rather than distanced representation and traditions based exclusively on masculinist desire.

McClary is clear when she says that there has been a 'silencing [of authentic music-making] through theory, mathematics, [and the] triad' so that 'performers [are always] striving for [the] perfect, standard sound' (1989: 152). My training in music departments of universities and the examination-focused music education system underscored this attitude. The expectation was to create 'perfect, standard sound' and to compose within set boundaries which when adhered to suppressed and silenced spontaneity.<sup>15</sup> To improvise is to take risks in 'noise-making' and the greatest risk of all for a Classical musician is to be free enough to 'make mistakes' while attempting to recreate the form as close to the composers' intentions as possible. It is that fear of making mistakes which stifles becoming and a sense of being in the moment. Music, at its most intuitive, is inclusive and encompassing of class, racial and territorial difference and is an activity in which intuitive risk-taking is implicit. The only way that

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<sup>15</sup>There is a gradual move towards credibility for (non-generic jazz) improvisation in institutions, though in my experience, most orchestral-trained musicians, who have come through conservatoria, cannot play at all without printed music. One encouraging sign has been the announcement of a major prize for 'art-music' improvisation by the ABC's *New Music Australia* radio program for 1999.

formalist musics can be recreated is by being re-created, 'as if' improvising.

Attali proposes that the noise of Classical music is no longer audible because it is contained in a higher act of violence: the refusal to enact the ruptures of discontinuous musical surfaces by silencing the human voice and making music as if it never had meaning and was nothing but orderly sound (1989: 6-19). Music making, at whatever level of participation, must re-enact the phenomenal moment to give the voice authentic agency. As a resonator to, with and in place, improvisatory practice is a contiguous medium in which to express the experiences of place in the moment of meeting place, all-over-the-place. This does not mean all music must be 'one-off' events but that in the re-creation of composed music, the 'rupture' must be still audible and vibrating.

## en-gendered garrisons

Idealistically speaking then, all music, if it facilitates improvisatory impulses, is an intuitive response to the moment and to a sense of space in time. Improvisation is a language of becoming, a 'pluralist democratic dimension', something in which everyone participates (in speech, movement or any phenomenal intention). But, as with any mode of art production, it can become exclusive territory, often alienating to those 'without its sanctuary'. This alienation from myths has been generated by terms like '"innovation", "genius", "creativity", the mystifications of theorists, the more opaque technical analysis of musicologists' (Johnson 1996: 2). These associations have

established such an 'exclusionary garrison' that an alternative more inclusive and open-ended term like 'improvisatory practice', coined by John Whiteoak<sup>16</sup> and borrowed to describe non-idiomatic improvisation and women's participation in it, is more applicable.

Women's voices have been silenced and excluded from the garrison of musical composition in general and idiomatic improvisation in particular. Through participating in non-idiomatic events there may be a pathway towards more freedom from this garrison and an opportunity to move into a space free from the stifling 'pretty' sounds expected to be revamped in concert halls. As one of the few female jazz players in Australia, Sandy Evans, commented on the jazz scene in New York:

*[M]ost women jazz players over there are involved in freestyle, improvised jazz. I related quite happily to that....But as a result men haven't taken them seriously....One reason women played in the improvising area of jazz is that they were less likely to have to meet demands of other professional situations - they were less likely to be asked in the first place (interview with Gina Schien in M. Breen 1987: 97-98).*

A high level of skill in any 'traditions' of improvisation can lead to exclusion for those with less developed skills or, in the case of women with the skills, exclusion because of gender. And it could be argued that the skill of a non-idiomatic or 'freestyle' improviser predisposes the style she is using to develop into an idiom. The historical progression of jazz from a free form of invention and social survival

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<sup>16</sup>John Whiteoak suggests that in Australia anomalies exist due to descriptions of 'genuine improvisation' (Roger Dean), 'cliches' (Bruce Johnson), and 'composition' as "frozen" improvisation' (Don Banks, who disagrees with this definition), all of which constrain the experience. Whiteoak uses the term 'improvisatory music' and goes so far as to describe some pieces as 'undeniably improvisatory in character' (see *Sounds Australian* Vol 14.48, 1996: 4).

to a garrisoned domain attests to this course. Is it possible to improvise at all - albeit with technical skill adapted from years of musical education - without imposing a 'style' on the invention? To 'play', in European Classical and jazz terms, has become associated with technical expertise rather than with 'thick description', and within the 'serious' discourses of improvisation, refinement and technical wizardry often takes precedence over intuition.

As a music therapist using 'free' improvisation with dementia sufferers, women in particular, I have noticed resistance to playing tuned instruments because clients instinctively compare themselves to standards which I, as the 'entertainer', represent. Through participation with non-pitched percussion instruments and simple stringed instruments like the autoharp, the improvisatory impulse can be made more accessible, particularly when there is no idiomatic assumption or gender bias. 'Play' is 'play-ful' in this sense, when all garrisoned borders have been stripped away and the adults, who have reverted to childhood images of the world and self, respond intuitively to cues and to the phenomena of their immediate surroundings.

Attali and McClary's placement of music-making in democratic contexts resonates with this sense of the need for accessibility and agency. However, access to language is crucial to opportunity: we are excluded from the experience, the garrison, because of widely practised myths - whether of gender, race, sexual preference or musical knowledge - and too easily reinforce these garrisons by making new sub-groups or by describing expressions only within the dominant models. I have often felt excluded from jazz bands and workshops as well as from computer-driven experimental

improvisation sessions because these groups, regardless of their free gesturing in 'sonic syntax', still project a gender-bias garrison in which language and skill are the key to knowledge and experimentation. While 'risk-taking' may be the key to gesturing, the mode can quickly become formalised and exclusive by the creation of borders and jargon.

Martin Sperber, attempting a more inclusive and open membership, says that the improvisational philosophy and outlook, 'in theory', holds promise for everyone. Its expression fosters participation that is exploratory and creative, an act in which it is possible to venture forth and return richer for the experience (1974: 3). Music therapy, in its widest context, is the ideal mode in which to generate exploratory improvisation that is inclusive and uncluttered by idiomatic description and in which participants can generate movements, sound or words from their own life-texts and intersubjective experiencing.<sup>17</sup>

All models of improvisation can contain a continuum of playful and intuitive moments but as technical requirements increase, these moments often lose their vibrancy, and so the less informed and experienced participants have to grapple with diminishing agency. How do women improvisers, without the therapeutic sphere, find ways through the garrison's guarded borders to a validated mode of art production?

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<sup>17</sup>Kenneth Bruscia, music therapist, cites several 'schools' of therapeutic improvisation: vocal improvisation, metaphoric improvisation, creative music therapy, free improvisation, analytical music therapy and experimental improvisation. While there are differences in approach, the aims are 'to improvise music of the highest artistic quality and beauty [and] always accept the client's improvising at whatever level it is offered, whether consisting of musical or sound forms, and regardless of its artistic or aesthetic merit' (1987: 5).

## process

As Johnson and Whiteoak argue, cultural myths work to exclude potential exploratory practice. But it is the intuitive act of that practice that I want to argue can be empowering and open to a broader range of possibilities which can, in feminist terms, provide an amoebic intertext which breaks from phallogentric language, panoptical surveys and canonical idioms.

In his introduction to *Compositions for Improvisers*, Pressing comments that 'the urge to creative performance is found in every musical environment' and that despite the either broadranging or cramped cultural scope, the 'core' of its expression 'lies in the individual's capacity for improvisational choice in real time, often motivated by the drive for self-expression, and constrained - or empowered - by the dictates of musical style and functionality' (1994: i). Style and functionality are terms we associate with certain reduced and idiomatic forms of improvisatory practice (formalised jazz in particular) and John Whiteoak, attempting to locate a definitive language of improvisatory practice for Australian culture says:

*...a map of improvisatory music-making in Australia becomes an extremely dense and complex patterning of cultural action unfolding over more than two hundred years of white settlement and extending back very much into the 'silence' of pre-colonial Aboriginal cultural history (in Sounds Australian Vol 14.48, 1996: 5).*

As Whiteoak has demonstrated in his formative work on improvisatory practice in Australia, the diversity of styles is significant and redolent of an eclecticism that has infiltrated

Australian musics. It is the Aboriginal model rather than the jazz traditions however to which I turn here, not for ethnomusicological purposes but to honour Aboriginal playfulness and inclusiveness and to show that improvisatory gesturing is larger and deeper than structured form. The idiomatic/non-idiomatic intertext that this music embodies may hold clues for women improvisers.

## song-lines

'Songline' songs, while idiomatic in the sense that they combine 'story' couplets with a repeating melodic motif (Attali's *sacrifice* medium), take on a non-idiomatic shape in performance.<sup>18</sup> Each performance is different and spontaneous and open to whoever happens to be present, providing a model for becoming which is deeply embedded in the land it sprang from and generated in the experience of the moment. Performance in this mode has the potential to fulfil Attali's dream for a 'free and decentralised society and political economy' and to activate a space that is between the borders he calls *sacrifice* (ritual practice) and *composition* (utopian potential).

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<sup>18</sup> Muecke, from his travels with Paddy Roe (and painter Krim Benterrak) in northern Western Australia, suggests that '[e]ach Aboriginal story has its moment in which an animal noise is imitated, or the sound of a windmill, or the song belonging to one of the characters...Songs usually fall into two major categories, ones "given" by the dreaming, *buggarrigarra*, and those invented by singers, *djabi* and *lilyin*...What is normally called a song cycle (*lilyin*) is the progression, song by song, along a given track in the country, from place to place' (1989: 54-55).

For example, in Pitjantjatjara songs: 'Nganampa mamaku tjamuku ngura manta milmiilpa nyangatja - Tjukurpatjara. Tjukurpa Ngintakatjara: This is our fathers' and mothers', grandfathers' and grandmothers' country. It's full of Law. It's full of dreaming, and it's sacred to us. Kangana Tjukurpa nyanga palunya pulkara atunymananyi kana kuwari Ngintaka - Ngintakaku Tjukurpa wangkanyi: And we look after this Law and the Dreaming in this country. We keep it safe. Now I am going to tell you the story of the Ngintaka Man - the Perentie Lizard' (tracks 2 & 3, Inma Ngintaka CD, Anangu Pitjantjatjara 1996).



During my stay in the Pitjantjatjara 'bush college' in the desert, I noticed that it was the women, who, in their deployment of rituals in which music could not be separated from the moment of experiencing, seemed to embody the sung moments. These women (often accompanying children and husbands) were totally spontaneous in their expression of familiar melody, words and percussion accompaniment.<sup>19</sup> I was drawn to participate in the circle by the laughter that always bubbled up through the events. The pleasure of the moment gave emphasis to the sense of process implicit in the enactment of the songs. The rehearsed moments of traditional song met the moments of becoming and filigreed joys, so that each woman voiced land-song-selves. Song, words, laughter and percussion metamorphosed together into a becoming whole.

My sense, drawn from my own experience, was that the human voice was acting as the vibrating hum of experience, of self in the liminal space. There was no need here for a self-conscious experience in 'consciousness expansion' or sonic meditation or ethnomusicological description. The feeling was one of deep intuition, inclusiveness, randomness, free will, process, enthrallment and sacrality of place.

## sidelines

Recalling the intuitive responses of the desert women through song and laughter and attempting to describe the experience reminds me of the difficulty of writing a critique, even of such an intuitive

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<sup>19</sup>Accompaniment is a misleading term as it implies, by association with Classical music traditions in concert-halls, that the use of rhythm sticks (and clapping) is secondary to the sung phrases when indeed both are integrated into a sense of unity and conversation.

process as improvisation, for which the theoretical basis is mostly described in generic terms.

The desert songs stand for themselves, unadorned over time except by spontaneous reshaping. They fulfil gender requirements of tribal law or bind male and female stories of the land together in particular ways. Custodians of particular places, through kinship ties, participate through re-inventing the mythologies of country with song and dance. The voices of the women<sup>20</sup> are that land, and their experiences of the land and its stories are directly voiced rather than mediated for them by male speakers.

In a patriarchal society however, this is not necessarily the case.<sup>21</sup> European mainstream literature, religion, science, philosophy and composition have penetrated my knowledge base to such an extent that while writing this thesis I have had to make choices constantly between traditional discourses and ideas and experiences of my own and other women. It may be an exaggerated claim but I believe I have been so colonised by European knowledges that working intuitively from within experience seems necessarily a painful process of self-agency.

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<sup>20</sup>The Pitjantjatjara tribe is strongly matriarchal due to a female custodian, Nganyinytja, being responsible for caring for her father's land and the welfare of her people. Nganyinytja's story is being transcribed and translated into English by Diana James (*Spirit of the Land* #3, 1999: 23-24).

<sup>21</sup>Lest I misrepresent this Aboriginal society as an idealised matriarchal one, I hasten to add that patriarchal norms also infest Aboriginal cultures and it is difficult to divest them of colonial influences to assess the extent of these influences. As all the older women and men in the Pitjantjatjara tribe had experienced the rigours of mission life before returning to their desert homelands, European 'norms' had permeated the cultural practices so that separation was impossible, and inappropriate, to measure.

Except for Monson and Smith's contribution, the foregoing quotations about improvisation have come from male theorists and musicians, demonstrating that practitioners as well as theorists are often within the garrison, although it would be unfair to say that all these males have a 'garrison mentality'. Monson writes almost exclusively about male jazz improvisers and, while positioning herself as a postcolonialist, does not take a feminist stance.<sup>22</sup> Smith's recent book *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts* in which she collaborated with improviser Roger Dean, while offering a comprehensive coverage of improvising techniques devotes few pages to the work of women improvisers. While this absence reflects the reality - that there are very few women improvisers - it also illustrates, as I discuss in 'Sounding #3', the need to widen the meaning of improvisation and the ways in which women composers often resort to compositional techniques which demonstrate covert forms of the genre. The work of women needs to be uncovered much more if the garrison is to be cracked open.

As Annette Kolodny puts it:

*we have had enough pronouncements of aesthetic valuation for a time; it is now our task to evaluate the imputed norms and normative reading patterns that, in part, led to those pronouncements* (in Glotfelty & Fromm 1996: 109).

Unless we take up the evaluation task with rigour, we fail to speak for ourselves, to validate the resonances of lived experience for women that are not the same as they are for men and so cannot

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<sup>22</sup>Monson works at unpacking the interactive space between improvising players. Her only autobiographical admission is that she is a white European jazz musician/academic writing about an African-American cultural experience. She does not mention her gender in the context of her musical experiences.

be interpreted in generic terms by them. Within a literary context, laura donaldson observes:

*A genuinely feminist semiotics can emerge only from the historicity of women's lives as they have lived them and must root imagination and the production of ideas solidly within the conditions of their material experience as women and workers (1992: 45).*

There is a predominance of male writing on most discourses, determining that women writers either engage (or collaborate) with those assertions, or become voices in the cacophony that is feminism. As Kolodny continues to reflect:

*The very energy and diversity of our [feminist literary criticism] enterprise have rendered us vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we lack both definition and coherence (1996: 101).*

To move away from the tracks requires determination because '[r]adical breaks are tiring, demanding, uncomfortable, and sometimes wholly beyond our comprehension' (Kolodny 1996: 105). To branch into self-reflexive narratives of my improvisatory practice and observations of the Aboriginal women is uncomfortable because it demands honest re-presentation, unmediated (if that is possible) by the anthropological or musicological theory of the garrisons. Yet I have had to look to established garrisons of theory to provide a language of description for improvisation as a text!

The preceding reflexive comments on validating women's experience and writing are by way of a lead into my use of de Certeau's work. I have struggled with what Elizabeth Grosz calls the 'stretching' of sedimented theories to feminist ideology but have chosen to apply fragments of the work of Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari and Attali, as well as many others, to my postmodern project for many reasons,

not least of which has been that the ideas have been open to adaptation to, and re-creation in, feminist aesthetics.

Poststructuralists' writings have made the way easier for feminists to appropriate ideas in ways that are less bound to phallogentric codes. Choices - of meaning, genre, form of expression - are more important than the firm essentialist boundaries of gender. Sexuality is a fluid concept, an unstable position, but representation of the sexed body still demands a language. Cixous suggests that feminine writing is 'not linear, logical or progressive...or constrained by traditional (masculine? patriarchal?) notions of argumentation and development. The movement of the essay is more fluid than direct, more experiential than argumentative' (Diane Price Herndl quoted in Warhol & Herndl 1997: 345). This thesis reflects that assertion and sounds a space of becoming from which women can voice their intuitive responses to being-in-the-world. My excursion into de Certeau's work, by way of understanding improvisation, is an example of how conditioning works both for and against establishing a passage for feminist dialogue. If feminists are to move beyond the 'ghetto' and reliance on autobiographicals - important though they are - that have given women's writing a 'too-indulgent' profile and feminism a disparate reputation,<sup>23</sup> appropriation as well as deconstruction and recreation is essential. To appropriate poststructuralist discourse carries less of the weight of canonical baggage perhaps.

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<sup>23</sup>Carolyn Heilbrun suggests that women's writings in the past has not been taken seriously because: they were 'written in the old genre of female biography, which tends to find beauty even in pain and to transform rage into spiritual acceptance' thereby concealing the truth. They indulged in nostalgia and romanticizing or, as in the case of biography (of Queen Elizabeth 1 for example), exaggerated, so that the subject is constructed as monstrous and abnormal. Women's lives in fictions have, historically, until recently (but not yet in many popular fictions) been demonstrated with safety and closure at marriage; anything outside that expectation is constructed as abnormality (1988: 12-21).

## de Certeau, postmodernism and the *habitus*

de Certeau's writing on intertextuality and interdisciplinarity is appropriate to a search for new words for 'between spaces', as it is writing that is open and welcoming.<sup>24</sup> de Certeau writes of the 'interspace' between utterance and writing, between language and the text. There is a passage, he says, that is constantly 'passing on as long as we have the force'. Poetry, especially mystic writing, 'narrativizes an endless exodus of discourse': words which through writing and experience 'embod[y] the name'. So 'from this perspective, writing is simultaneously the opening of passageways and the construction of a body' (1995: 113,114). Applying this to improvisation, I would add that it is both the passage and the corporeal event. It exists before, during and after the event, as the embodied improviser, as the potential for multiple readings of text and as dialogic interspace. Improvisation is never completed, full or closed.

de Certeau's work resounds to the possibilities that postmodernism creates, the arena of plurality where the new and old mutate or create. But as Grosz points out, quoting Rosi Braidotti, postmodernism is not popular with some feminists because 'one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted [or]...deconstruct a sexuality which has been historically defined as dark and mysterious' (in Grosz 1995: 64). Grosz assures us however

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<sup>24</sup>Michel de Certeau's writing itself represents the *between* or *rhizome* to which Deleuze and Guattari refer. That is, the impulse, the expression and the product signify what life is; or, as Wlad Godzich says in the foreword to *Heterologies*: 'discursive activity is a form of social activity, an activity in which we attempt to apply the roles of the discourses we assume...leading to "reponsibility as historical actors"' (1995: xxi). Interdisciplinarity then is a more truthful and relational way of being.

that deconstruction is 'a mode of affirmation, indeed a mode of double affirmation' (1995: 61).

This thesis, as an example of a postmodern artefact, is an affirmation of the process of creativity that deconstructs even as it recreates refrain: its generating moments are layering themselves into a fractured/fissured artefact which represents - while deconstructing and re-creating - my thoughts, feelings, research experiences and creative imagination: the journey through a space which generates many byways. The *palim-plus*. Postmodernist art has pleasure in itself, in becoming itself, in layering possibilities for becoming, and in resonating with the fundamental impulses of improvisation and performance. Postmodernist art can be an intuitive and random connection towards and beyond a pre-time when there is/was only being and becoming in the liminal space: the impulse, the gesture, the intention. Postmodernist texts enable self-relexivity and depth in creative acts, echoing 'becoming' events rather than the nostalgic return to myth and classical figures or obsession with 'the new' that modernist art idealised. As theorist of the postmodern, Fredric Jameson writes:

*...if the experience and the ideology of the unique self, an experience and ideology which informed the stylistic practice of classical modernism, is over and done with, then it is no longer clear what artists and writers of the present period are supposed to be doing...this means that contemporary or postmodern art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way (1998: 6).*

While this description may sound pessimistic and nebulous, it also shows that the postmodern shift away from the claustrophobia of Absolute ideals in the arts has not been clamped into fixed and closed

categories. In my own work as an improviser-composer, I have tried to move within and yet away from the pervading conditioning of music education, including the garrison of jazz, modernism and computer improvisation, to create acoustic art that is neither stationary nor fixed. By that I mean that I sculpt musical fragments which challenge the rules of noise-making that have become commonplace in concert hall practices and garrisons of composition. I establish a quasi-idiom in the process of rule-breaking while attempting to continue to break the rules established by myself in the process of making sounds and to be attuned to the process of intentionality.

However, rules, categories and theories do not easily bend to accommodate spontaneous art-making. de Certeau points to the problems of creating a theoretical discourse out of lived experience:

*When theory, instead of being a discourse upon other persistent discourses, ventures into non- or pre-verbal domains in which there are only practices without any accompanying discourse, certain problems arise. There is a sudden shift, and the usually reliable foundation of language is missing. The theoretical operation suddenly finds itself at the limits of its normal terrain, like a car at the edge of the cliff. Beyond, nothing but the sea (1995: 189).*

The *habitus* of experience is the improvising space in which language is formed in the act, 'the sea', of creativity, as an embodiment of past and present in place. de Certeau, speaking of Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* says:

*...the habitus[is an] invisible place where...the structures are inverted as they are interiorized, and where the writing flips over again in exteriorizing itself in the form of practices that have the deceptive appearance of being free improvisations (1984: 58).*



It is in within this place, the space of desire, creativity and self-understanding, that theory is forgotten in the pursuit of intuitive acts.

## sounding self

Applying idiomatic elements to non-idiomatic creations has enabled me to push across the boundaries of convention and so my improvisations fall between idiomatic and non-idiomatic descriptions and genre. Following an extended education in Classical repertoire and technique for the violin, I learned to improvise in jazz idioms before experimenting with free association. Reading academic discourses on jazz has helped me describe the process of improvisation in a generic context. My improvised playing contains elements of Classical and jazz idioms but not within any prearranged structure or idiom. To discard formalist confinements and re-organise some elements of form to my own soundings has been a process of subversion as much as creativity. The clearest example of my border-crossing has been in my use of a score, either discarded altogether or reduced to one-page for improvising. One listener to my improvisations to poetry commented that 'they are very Classical in texture'. The score to *Sonic Arc* has fragments of notation that have roots in Classical idioms but are subverted by deconstruction.

My use of Classical instruments like violin and viola predetermines certain European musicological references such as rhythms, bowing styles, motifs, tone, intonation and dynamic range, even when the

instruments are explored outside conventional musical practice.

Improvisatory practice, as an expression of feminine desire, provides a space in which to challenge the privileging of through-composed and generic forms.<sup>25</sup> Engaging with the viola as an unstable text (body) for example may mean randomly hitting the strings with the wood of the bow, blowing into the 'f' holes, singing into the 'f' holes to set off the harmonics or rubbing the thumb along the neck of the viola to make a creaking sound and humming, singing or speaking at the same time. In this sense the 'naturalness' of the viola merges with my own body and the dialogue is within myself, between myself and the instrument, between the other participant and myself, and, when improvising to poetry, in the space between the other person's text and body and my body and viola. As intertextuality, this is the liminal space in which the listener participates intuitively at any level of knowledge and from which the improviser creates soundings drawn from the *habitus*. But, to theorise about this experience is almost impossible. As Yehudi Menuhin said of his improvisations with jazz and Indian musicians: 'it is born of that instant and is like liberty: easily abused and constrained by its own parameters. [Improvisation] is a lesson in freedom' (interview with Margaret Throsby ABC FM, October 18, 1998).

## improvisation as play

Well known Australian record producer Belinda Webster, who has done much to bring 'new music' out into public hearing, says that 'so many

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<sup>25</sup>By 'through-composed' I mean a musical artefact written note-for-note as the player/s will play.

more of our musicians could experience the joy of being an improviser if only they were exposed to it as a valid form of musical expression throughout their training'. Improvisation is 'an indication of what was going on in a particular musician's mind on a particular day' she says (*Sounds Australian* #44, 1994-95: 38). Sadly, The rigours and expectations of the music education system (and the recording industry) do not allow for the creaks and splashes from within the cacophony.

To become free from the system of patriarchal forms and knowledge is impossible but describing and depicting experience, in phenomenological terms, can open new spaces. As Toril Moi says, '[a]ll ideas, including feminist ones, are in a sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology' and this includes musicology and the conventions of composition and improvisation (1997: 105). Unless women take responsibility for building a perspective beyond the limited self, agency will remain a fraught and vulnerable domain. Jean Baker Miller, a feminist who has challenged Jung's concept of the ego as common to both genders, suggests that women may not have an ego in the first place and that ego is a patriarchal privilege:

*Prevailing psychoanalytic theories about women's weaker ego or super-ego may well reflect the fact that women have no ego or super-ego at all...Women do not come into the picture in the way that men do. They do not have the right or the requirement to be full-fledged representatives of the culture...This experience begins at birth and continues through life. Out of it, women develop a psychic structuring for which the term ego...may not apply (quoted in Demaris Wehr, 1987: 101).*

The idea of ego/non-ego is critical to self-agency for women artists. If ego is male-domain through centuries of reinforcement, then the task for women is *not* to emulate that model but to discover a new and appropriate

reservoir of images and a language of becoming that will generate event-potential and the joy of being undefined by essentialist terms or representation. By resonating to place, self and others through deep attunement that is intuitive response, enthrallment, enrapture and dialogue, the moment may be voiced in ways that sing the diversity of women's experience rather than generic traditions.

As a lesson in 'what freedom is', improvisation, as a mode of production, demands an enormous responsibility and 'great discipline': not the rigid self-application needed for re-interpretation of a composer's desire but resonance to the acoustic of now, whether in thoroughly extemporised events or in intuitive responses to pre-composed motifs which reflect the free will of intuited gestures. This claim could be made too of postmodern production, the unmediated space in which the muse can speak.

### a-muse-ment

Working from a body of i-mages (inspiration-to-self) awakens the muse,<sup>26</sup> which for male poets has resided outside themselves and been represented, in the gaze of the male poet, as female.<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>26</sup>The muses were female companions to the gods Apollo and Zeus and also a 'ninefold Goddess as the source of "inspiration," literally breathing in "I-deas" or Goddess-spirits within. The muses were originally a triad - the primordial Triple Goddess....The seven-tone musical scale was the Muses' invention, supposedly based on their "music" of the seven spheres. Scipio the Elder said the spheres "produce seven distinct tones; the septenary number is the nucleus of all that exists. And men, who know how to imitate this celestial harmony with the lyre, have traced their way back to the sublime realm' (see Barbara Walker *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* San Francisco: Harper 1983: 701).

<sup>27</sup> Mary DeShazer says: 'Among the Romantics, the muse often reveals herself through nature as the universe itself, feminized. As Mother Nature's "son", the poet is the inheritor of her vast powers: by appropriating his mother's strength, the poet can 'give birth' to his (or 'her') poems' (1986: 17).

alterity could be called psychic panopticism, if stemming from a projection of the feminine, as Jung's psychoanalytic model would suggest.<sup>28</sup> Even at the level of 'inspiration', the gaze towards the feminine 'Other' is privileged male (gaze) over female (Other-muse).

What is the muse for women and does improvisation offer an alternative to masculinist desire on which notions of the muse are predicated? Is it a reversal of the alterity that constitutes male projection? For female religious artists a male 'God' often becomes the projected muse, the externalised Other charged with numinosity, 'telling us what to express', Mary DeShazer says, so that 'the female poets' male muse functions as both a projection of her own male side and a composite figure of the male precursors whose tradition she is attempting to enter' (1986: 28).

For many eighteenth and nineteenth century female writers (eg Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti), there is a tension between 'envisioning the father/lover that surpasses individuals' and feeling dominated by the "authoritative" masculine muse' (DeShazer 1986: 28). As a post-romantic woman for whom 'the role of the muse and poet have shifted, [Dickinson] wavers between feeling that she must wait to receive her Master/muse and radical rejection of its presence' (Diehl quoted in DeShazer 1986: 28).

For modern women writers there has been a continuation of this tension but also a reworking of the concept of the muse as a part of

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<sup>28</sup>Jung's theory of the contrasexual types - 'anima' and 'animus' - is that these two poles reside in both the male and female psyche. It is what we do with these aspects of ourselves that determines the depth of our individuation or maturation of 'Self'. To 'project' the feminine, for a male, is considered to be a non-integrated way of being and so too is the inversion (see Frieda Fordham 1990: 114-115).

the self rather than as a projection from the self. In 'An Address to My Muse', Gwen Harwood addresses the muse as an ambiguous presence:

*Dear Sir, or Madam, as the case is,  
blest being of so many faces,  
known to the Furies and the Graces,  
don't be a clown,  
just slip off those artistic braces  
and settle down*

*Please put off all your other suitors,  
the ponces and the lusty rooters,  
the plagiarists and sneaky looters -  
or break their necks -  
unload that party of freebooters.  
Show me your sex...*

*Male colleagues making open mention  
of how they're spared the fearful tension  
of playing the two-part invention  
which I must learn,  
would never touch the metric pension  
I have to earn...*

*Surely a spring where all may drink  
and turn black sorrows into ink.  
Or is that true and blushful pink  
water restricted?...*

(reprinted in Hampton/Llewellyn 1986: 95)

In a later poem, 'To the Muse', she identifies the muse with nature, both external and within herself:

*If by some chance I wrote  
a fine immortal poem  
it would have a mortal theme.  
All that excess of life  
in museums of the mind  
still there to contemplate!*

*What consent do we ever*

*give to dreams that embrace us  
with the energy of art?  
Why do you come at morning  
when frosty air is burning  
my empty arms?...*

*Tell me, what is your name?*  
(reprinted in Smith/Scott 1985: 76 )

This resolution through nature nominates an allegiance to the external force of nature, but does not invert the discourse of alterity that infects much European poetry. Harwood's muse is a process of becoming that is the creative act itself, found in the sacred and intuitive space of belonging. Unresolved tension for Rosemary Dobson however refigures the male poet as a role-model for herself:

*The archetypal poet, I know,  
Over the imagined world  
Sought his still-evasive Muse.  
By night and day escaping skirts  
Troubled the corner of his eye,*

and, the muse conflated with nature:

*Hopeless all his long pursuit,  
Felt her lovely shoulders start  
Into wing and into leaf  
And knew Apollo's chagrined grief*  
(*'The Passionate Poet and his Muse'* 1973: 85)

But in 'Dry River' Dobson calls upon the muse in response to apprehension of nature and her relationship with it:

*Strange illusion that such a creek-bed  
May seem to brim and shine at dew-fall,  
Or ripple with shadow, or sound like water  
With the cool, clear notes of the bell-birds' making.  
Mirages deceive: I wait with longing*

*A flood of poems, a rain of rhyme.  
(1973: 98)*

Here the dry river bed is a metaphor for her feeling of inadequate creativity and the rain a trope for the coming of inspiration. Dobson declines to feminise nature, although that may be in the subtext, given the strong male traditions of poetry she emulates. Nevertheless the muse is conflated with feminine desire towards nature that has a feminine presence.

For Angela Rockel however the muse comes in angelic form as Michael, a 'between' figure of ethereality. The poem 'In its Arms' refers to 'the place where creation hatches':

*At the full only;  
eclipse, void appearing,  
belly holding the night sky  
fearful, drawing you in.*

*Look steadily while what you know  
slides away into silence:  
this is the place  
where creation hatches.  
Enter, be carried again  
on that sea,  
quiet and stars rebuilding  
a body of light to see by.  
Find the place where songs beat  
thick and bright, outwards.  
Know what you are;  
a pulse repeating this body  
this habit of voice  
along the line as a people like a riftline;  
the hotsprings, the lava-flow  
pushing up  
for healing or destruction -  
the same fire  
in hollow ground  
under the feet of the dancers.*



*Survive, be born again;  
 understanding the terror is vision;  
 the full moon and the new moon  
 in the sky together.  
 (1995: 214)*

Rockel says that while the natural world forms the body of images central to her work, the uncovering of the articulating impulse - the will to speak and write - is an ongoing quest that precipitates the invention of many poems (various communications, 1983–1998). This impulse - intention/intentionless moment/s of the speaking subject - is her a-muse-ment. Her poems attempt to articulate and give form to the improvisatory impulse.

For Sarah Day, creativity requires a crossing over from the make-believe, which she believes is the precursor to creativity in everyday reality, to the multiple realities of the imagination. In this space, 'focus' takes place, a commitment to revealing what is 'within the miniature' and to 'trusting the other realities' (personal communication 5.1.2000). In 'A World in a Grain of Sand', she evokes the creative process, her muse, like contours within contours:

*Stepping past the janitor  
 Into the metropolis beneath the kitchen table  
 Was unbounded reprieve.  
 Adult conversation and cigarette smoke  
 Ranged overhead, unconscious as fronts;  
 Speakers were monolithic,  
 We were on butterfly time.  
 From the inside looking out  
 Objects lost definition.  
 In the refuge of the miniature  
 The vast takes shape.  
 Scale is sophistry where make-believe's concerned.*

*A toy boat on a harbour which is a contour in a bay  
Which is a contour in a harbour  
Is about to set sail to exotic shores of invisible countries.  
Let's pretend is the signal that the ship is leaving,  
An invitation to a world at least as large  
As that whose door has sealed behind us.  
(in A Madder Dance 1991: 74)*

## evoking the words

In my improvisations to poems of place (see accompanying CD *improvisation-image-voice*), the muse is the space in which poetic metaphor and sonic response meet. The metaphors of the poets' finely tuned poems imbue the process of creating sonic responses with a sense of belonging, joy and magic. We meet in the space between. Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, speaks to this phenomenon when he says:

*When two images meet, two images that are the work of two poets [or poet and musician in our case] pursuing separate dreams, they apparently strengthen each other. In fact, this convergence of two exceptional images furnishes as it were a countercheck for phenomenological analysis. The image loses its gratuitousness; the free play of the imagination ceases to be a form of anarchy (1994: 59).*

Bachelard's inflection is phenomenological, with fingerings in many discourses, but it is in the collusion of space and sonic/visual metaphor that mythopoetic melody sings for me:

*Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost (1994: 6).*

My experience of improvising to poems has been a journey aboard an emotional craft. The tonality of my musical responses is 'an expression of the poetry that was lost' that I can only articulate through sounds-without-words, while listening to someone else's words and acknowledging that the combined sonic and linguistic metaphors cradle my sense of place, losses, knowing and un-knowing, as well as my coming to understanding. The disciplined responsibility of improvisation that Menuhin speaks of is this deep listening and becoming-being, without hubris.

Bachelard also figures the phenomena of silence and solitude, two elements that are essential to the muse, sense of emplacement, and any moments of creativity, and to daydreams rather than to feminised figures in the landscape. All this, he says, is more important than dates, the 'conjunctive temporal tissue, which has no action in our fates',

*And so, faced with these periods of solitude, the topoanalyst starts to ask questions: Was the room a large one? Was the garret cluttered up? Was the nook warm? How was it lighted? How, too in these fragments of space, did the human being achieve silence? How did he relish the very special silence of the various retreats of solitary daydreaming (1994: 9,10).*

To challenge the 'malestream' education and context consciously, through humour, re-figuring textual legacies, and playful nonsense, my improvising becomes my own and that of the other: my magic and i-mages, and therefore a feminist discourse as well as of course a postmodern artefact. This discourse will not be structured so much by ego or traditions based on power, domination and rules but will draw from the deep well of human experience and being that is not so

easily defined by those terms - 'scribbling blue sonorities', as Bachelard describes syncretising metaphors. A synergy. The *habitus*-space between, the sacred place that is all-over-the-place, liminal and becoming. The muse is the work itself, it-self, self-other. As Indian raga player, Bart, says, improvisation is a 'skeleton', the bones of the body of the self which find flesh in the act of conversation (*Radio Eye ABC RN*, December 20, 1998).

### becoming resonances

Improvisation is primarily play, losing/loosing the fixed temporal and spatial conditioning which presides over our imagination. Post-structuralists like Derrida and Cixous play with text so that traditions are disrupted in deconstructive events. Single words may signify familiar concepts that in *sentences* and phrases (which as hermeneutic phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur proposes are more central to experiencing than 'the word'<sup>29</sup>) shift and explode these concepts. For Cixous the act of creating puns and word play is improvising a between-text; for Derrida any signifier has endless signifieds so that the text can be deconstructed until it undermines its own assumptions.<sup>30</sup>

It is to Cixous's work that I return often for a model of intertextuality, for a marrying of theoretical and 'creative'

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<sup>29</sup>Ricoeur, attempting to describe metaphor in phenomenological terms, says that 'words only acquire an actual meaning in a sentence' and even then the meanings are 'potential' in 'typical contexts'. He says that the sentence supports a 'double reference: intentional and reflexive, turned towards the thing and towards the self' (1981: 168).

<sup>30</sup>For Cixous (responding to Derrida), the difference in the text became 'the feminine, the music (*donne le la*); other entries to meaning the between at work which escapes classification' (1997:169).

discourses. Her constantly evolving play of word-meaning in any discourse and a desire to capture the improvised expression of the writing impulse, as sentences and phrases, through poetry, fiction and theatre, is enchanting.

Cixous writes about temporality with irony and multiple meanings:

*An hour passes, they do not see it pass,  
the clocks notice nothing, it passes  
through their mesh. What is there  
to say about the hour? It was in the process  
of becoming pearls, the presentiment of  
the future was in the process of coating  
it and isolating it from all mortality. The  
hour was a foreign body in the clock-  
work time.*

*It goes on, stretches out.*

*- God, they said to themselves -*

*- Is it that way?*

*- They will not be long to touch  
themselves but I no longer know when.*

*Because they did not hear each other  
say the things that were said between the  
words: it is that way, come, what is it?*

*('Beethoven a jamais' in 1997: 162)*

In phenomenological terms, improvisation, as a process in time and space, is encoded in intentionality, in moments generated by the will to make a mark on the ear's *tabula rasa*. However, there is a pre-forming that preempts the intention, so that 'interaction becomes communication and a sense that things have a lived experience, even when non-lived or inorganic, because they are perceptions and affections' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 155).

It is the 'refrain', the going back on itself, whether in bird song or musical motif that is transmuted through compositional

improvisation. Improvisation is refrain: it refrains from a sedimentary form, a tired replaying of noise where the violence, to use Attali's term, has been smoothed over or dressed up. As an intuitive becoming, improvisation re-lives each moment through refrain. This is the lived experience in the sonorous space.

Charlie McMahon, Aboriginal didjeridu player for whom improvisation is beginning and being, says:

*to me improvisation is how you start...it ceases to be improvisation once it becomes a fairly set arrangement and is given a name (in Sounds Australian Vol 14.48, 1996: 20).*

This concretising of compositional material takes place once motifs and extended forms are written down or recorded, making them constants available for subsequent re-readings and interpretations, potentially bland reproductions like sad paintings from the old masters or vibrant productions reduced to reproductions. But all motifs and extended forms begin as untried phenomena, whether as head-sounds transcribed onto manuscript by the 'serious' composer, or as acoustic moments in the journey of the improviser.

To embark on a sonic journey which lives only for itself (even when in dialogue with others) within the moment of the event, is truly 'becoming': the event becomes-music in the act of expression, turning back upon itself and thereby challenging the refrain that Deleuze and Guattari suggest is implicit in musical language. As the cosmos is an intertext of refrains, 'the question of music is that of a power of deterritorialisation permeating nature, the elements, and deserts as much as human being' (1987: 307). The danger in deterritorialisation in music is the 'overcoding', of what Deleuze and

Guattari call 'making punctual' systems which then concretise the event, enshrining the violence, shedding the flow of signifiers and the power of mythopoetic potential.

The act of 'setting' a sonic metaphor then can easily, but not exclusively, deterritorialise becoming-sound to the point where a reduction in becoming-potential takes place; the alchemy of creation ceases for the improviser, although as text it always remains open to a succession of improvised hermeneutic discoveries in listening and performance. If sound is not re-configured in traditions of textual meaning (that is through notation and recording) its becoming remains innovative and experimental but then lost to follow-on responses.

But what are these follow-ons? I am not advocating the advent of disposable music, or the one-off composition, but rather a freshness and focus in performance that is conversational, relational, place-sensitive and self-aware. This is the enactment of tapping the muse in the self with others - living in the moment.

How innovative is a non-transcribed improvisation? Surely the use of traditional instruments, even the didjeridu, and familiar modes, pitches, timbres and rhythms, confine the event to a well-used figuration of sound-shapes? Are not our ears so conditioned by the traditions of European musics, instruments and improvisation techniques that 'new' moments are impossible? Can a new melody be created or have they all been tried? Is this the postmodern dilemma? Innovation is possible where the innovator stays close to the experience, to 'the act of authentic expression', as Merleau-Ponty

puts it (1973: 127). The silent intention undergoes transformation into metaphors and truth.

## transformation through intuition

If intuition is 'an immediate apprehension by the mind and senses without reasoning' generating 'immediate insight' (Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary), then improvisation, by reason of its inherent ephemerality and conversational ethic, relies on intuition both for reception and for the creative act itself. The improvised event as becoming-music is infused with the light of intuition. Thomas Clifton suggests that 'the question of intuition is',

*not whether the description is subjective, objective, biased or idiosyncratic, but very simply is whether or not the description says something significant about the intuited experience so that the experience itself becomes something from which we can learn and in so doing learn about the object of the experience as well....Intuitive descriptions erect their own structures very much in the same way that scientific descriptions do: slowly, methodically with frequent erasures and backtracking. Both kinds of description are concerned with intersubjective information* (quoted in Bailey 1980: 4).

Intersubjectivity serves the intuition and therefore the muse. Muse and intuition merge to become the embodied self in the act of imaginative play. The coming together of beings, both active and passive, generates a potent-iality. The events rely both on the action and inaction of the players in the theatre of becoming. For the artists working in dialogue, making rests on interactive discourse, with all its emotional intensity, intentions, background of training and potential for deeper dialogue-becoming. Like word play for Cixous and Derrida,



an intuitive sense of the moment allows a deeper plunge into the possibilities for new and mutated form in all directions, internally and externally, unknown and known. For de Certeau, the 'passage' in which an 'interspace' is created is the process itself.

The 'interspace' in which the speaking subject engages in intuitive discourse may be a spiritual domain resonating in improvisation. Improvising can have a replenishing effect which is akin to the spiritual depth of emplacement. In this space the deepest vibrations resonate.

Tim Hodgkinson, exploring the ritual practices of shamans in Siberia, comments that 'unlike most religious ritual, shamanic seances had a powerful and improvisational dimension' and that 'in order to re-enter the special psychological state involved, the shaman had to prepare by getting rid...of his or her normal everyday persona' (1996: 59). The space where improvising takes place, under these conditions, resonates with a fantastic or mystical timbre. The temporal dimension is not fixed or predetermined, qualities that could be said to be true to any experience of improvisation in which participant is alert and committed to its phenomena. What is common too to shamanic practice is that the context for rituals is usually 'outside' space, made into sacred-place by the event. By way of improvisation the players become 'at one' with the land in which they perform their private and public sacralisations.

## land and improvisatory practice

Luce Irigaray sums up the desire for grounding when she says:

*I wanted to go back to this natural material which makes up our bodies, in which our lives and environment are grounded: the flesh of our passions...The passions are to do with fire and ice, light and night, water and submersion, earth and the discovery of ground, respiration in its most profound and most secretly vital sense (1986: 1).*

For the ordinary woman inhabiting postmodern times, how does the land, or sense of place, relate to improvisatory practice other than through embodied memories and verbal evocation? In *Gaia and God*, Ruether brings together the interactive dimensions of play and ecological diversity:

*When species are extinguished, not just one species, but whole communities of interdependent plants, animals and insects are wiped out. The result is a degraded whole. The many species, with their great capacity for creative interaction are replaced by a few hardy species that thrive under adverse conditions...Not least among the losses of such environmental degradation may be the aesthetic imagination that can sustain human biophilia, and with it the moral urge to value life itself. It may not be accidental that so much of the art, music and poetry of modern urban environments is nihilistic. Without the rich beauty of the natural environment, humans may also have been losing that which has nurtured their moral-aesthetic 'soul', their sensitivity to complex and subtle realities, their capacity to imagine ecstatically and to care deeply about life (1992: 102).*

The deepest resonances come to relationship, or interconnection, modelled by biotic and abiotic forms which are constantly evolving a dance of inter-reliance. The ever-changing process stretches in a continuum of exchange with others. Although nature has structures, no two cells are the same. Each one evolves and changes in relation

to the overall system of climate, place, time and contact with other forms so that ecological diversity is beyond imagination in all dimensions. Nature provides a symbiotic template and improvising intertext for health, change, freedom, diversity, movement, life and death.

Merleau-Ponty speaks to this sense of grounding in space as a model for subjectivity and intersubjectivity:

*At first, art and poetry are consecrated to the city, the gods, and the sacred, and it is only in the miracle of the external power that they can see the power of their own miracle. Later, both know a classic age which is the secularisation of the sacred age; it is then the representation of a Nature that it can at best embellish - but according to formulas taught to it by Nature herself (1974: 44).*

Here the female rendering of 'Nature' (herself) is deeper than apprehension of an object: a sense of primordial essence in 'Nature' and art together, a commingling of example, response, becoming and reflection as a miracle. While the sexist language here feeds the traditions of land-as-female and muse-as-female for the male artist, it is clear that 'Nature', whatever sex it embodies, provides an intertext for becoming. Merleau-Ponty suggests that art (painting, for him) can be 'free of their canons' by containing different meanings and 'perhaps more meaning than the painters thought' (1974: 45). As an artist moves from language to speech, an 'embellishment' happens that is part of the corporeal self and a response to 'Nature' in its fullest sense.

If artistic response and expression are reflections of past and present moments, where 'they pass into one another', then the

product/event is a merging of these things, unknown wholly to ourselves and yet deeply ourselves as beings-in-nature. Speech (or musical events) 'has no other role than finding in the exact expression assigned in advance to each thought by a language of things themselves' (1974: 44). He calls this a 'double recourse' to an 'art before an art', or to a 'speech before a 'speech', that 'prescribes...a perfection, completeness, or fullness':

*Don't we all have eyes, which function more or less in the same way? And if the painter has known how to discover the sufficient signs of depth or velvet, won't we all, in looking at the painting, see the same spectacle, which will rival that of Nature (1974: 45)?*

Merleau-Ponty rages against the Cartesian 'dream of a universal language' (O'Niell 1974: iv) of the mind, the separation of body and mind that has permeated his discipline (of philosophy) to the point of choking the sense of the body from discourses. His work has revived the acknowledgement of thought and expression, language and speech as whole, a corporeality of living, an expression of 'the poetics of our being-in-the-world'. As John O'Niell says, in the introduction to Merleau-Ponty's essays, 'we begin with',

*the first act of perception which brings into being the perspective of form and ground through which the invisible and ineffable speaks and becomes visible in us. All other cultural gestures are continuous with the first institution of human labour, speech and art through which the world takes root in us (1974: xxxix).*

For the improviser, the body and expression are one, such 'that the phenomenology of expression is always an act of self-improvisation in which we borrow from the world, from others, and from our own past efforts. Language is the child in us which speaks of the world in order

to know who he[she] is' (O'Neill 1974: xi). The child within, through 'self-improvisation', needs to 'speak' in order to become self, to know self, to be-come.

## liminal spaces

Improvisation then is a union and a between-space of many things: language and speech, synchrony and diachrony (our impulses are informed at every level by our histories and our presence), body and mind, knowing and unknowing. It is discovery in the process of doing and being, a unity of and an opening away from extreme subjectivism (the self) and extreme objectivism (representation, alterity) (1962: 1v). Addressing the phenomena of the experiential world, Merleau-Ponty says:

*The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and others intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own (1962: xviii).*

There is a symbolic sense for me as improviser-composer in this model of becoming and unity which is universal, feminine and much more. Rather than choosing to repeat an intuitive cell for replaying by myself or others, each moment, as it leaves my body as sound, becomes itself as music, both in relation to my body, experience, ideas and places that created it, and in relation to the other participant/s that engaged sonically with the becoming-music moment. So, nature, as community for 'creative interaction',

provides the fundamental imaginal soil from which all other creative endeavour grows. It is communication - with self, with the body, the mind and with others in the moment of making. This is the sacrality, of creative enterprise and improvisation is its forming.

Bigwood, speaking of the reduction to dualism in patriarchal discourses, suggests that an absencing of the feminine is required so that the feminine no longer becomes or remains as object and that the powerlessness is a complete change from the 'Will to Power' of the phallocentric paradigm (1993: 98). This absence is a location of the feminine in liminal space, as the world of being and becoming. As Irigaray says, we need 'to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation' (1989: 76) which is 'not so much a metaphysical reversal but a deconstructive strategy' (Bigwood 1993: 99).

Bigwood attempts to recuperate the improvisatory process in the lived experience of women in an ecological awareness:

*As living bodies, we are not in full cognitive possession of determinate, sensed objects but are irretrievably immersed in an ever-changing and indeterminate context of relations. We find ourselves in a field constantly filled with fleeting plays of colours, noises, and tactile feelings that nonetheless usually emerge as meaningful by means of a communication with our surroundings that is more ancient than thought (1993: 52).*

This appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body's sympathetic relation to its surroundings, or *sentience*, emerges as a resolution of the dualisms of matter and spirit, self-conscious subject and object-world. It is at first non-linguistic and non-cognitive. Here is the connection with improvisation as an event charged with meaning but unknown until the moment of playing. And land, nature,

or 'world-earth-home', is a model for experiencing a song which we sing, chant and play.

what then is music?

What is the musical impulse, the need to express self through sound gestures? Why is listening to and playing music so essential to human happiness and to being at home in the world?

'Linked to life itself', music<sup>31</sup> consists of 'essential' themes, according to Deleuze and Guattari:

*We could say that the refrain is properly musical content, the block of content proper to music...A child comforts itself in the dark or claps its hands or invents a way of walking...a woman sings to herself, "I heard her softly singing a tune to herself under her breath". A bird launches into its refrain. All of music is pervaded by bird songs, in a thousand different ways, from Jannequin to Messiaen. Frr, Frr. Music is pervaded by childhood blocks, by blocks of femininity (1987: 300).*

As a woman I resist the use of woman as object of contiguity with music: 'blocks of femininity'. Deleuze and Guattari do not refer to 'masculinity' or to men in quite the same way. While their postmodern context and postfeminist awareness generates inclusive language,

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<sup>31</sup>Music is 'a mystical order...linked to the origin of life itself in some traditions, notably in India where sound is regarded in Hindu doctrine as the primordial vibration of divine energy. Primitive music, based on rhythm and imitations of the sounds of animals and the natural world, was essentially an attempt to communicate with the spirit world. With the development of...instruments and harmonics, music became a symbol of the cosmic order and was associated in China and in Greece with number symbolism and with the planet ("harmony of the spheres"). Yin or Yang qualities were allocated to the semitones of the earliest Chinese octave, music thus becoming a symbol of the vital duality holding together disparate things. In art, musicians or musical instruments often symbolize peace or love' (Tressider, *Dictionary of Symbols* 1997: 140).

there is a lingering Otherness which destroys the value of their perceptions for a feminist/humanist position. However, the phenomenological impulses are clearly evoked:

*Music is pervaded by every minority, and yet composes an immense power. Children's, women's, ethnic, and territorial refrains, refrains of love and childhood blocks...it is in fact a question of the most essential and necessary content of music. The motif of the refrain may be anxiety, fear, joy, love, work, walking, territory...but the refrain itself is the content of music (1987: 300).*

Despite this feminisation of becoming-sound, Deleuze and Guattari's description is a beautiful evocation of music-becoming. Messiaen's music, patriarchal and canonical though it is, paints pictures of the natural and spiritual realm that transports the listener beyond those systems and further than the space in which violence keeps sounds repetitively 'beautiful'. Deleuze and Guattari's system unfolds new ways of describing the delights of phenomena, particularly of sonority:

*Music...uproots the refrain from its territoriality. Music is a creative, active operation that consists in deterritorialising the refrain. Whereas the refrain is essentially territorial, territorializing the refrain, or reterritorializing, music makes it a deterritorializing content for a deterritorializing form of expression (1987: 300).*

A refrain (as in bird/child-call) repeats a motif with little variation and is synonymous with experience, place, and body, so that music-making takes the motif through and beyond in order to 'become' something more. This 'something more' will always retain essentials of the refrain, and it is this 'earthing' or *ground*, to use a Baroque musical term, that is improvisation. The cell - that is the motif,



refrain or ostinato<sup>32</sup> - is released, and fed by the imaginal impulse to become an improvised event, a richer, deeper and more personalised response to the cell that gave it meaning.

Music is a rich resource of sonorities from the cacophony-in-the-world that feeds the deeper self, the aching suffering and ecstatic pleasure that is the human condition. In the following poem, Rockel brings together the corporeal with the musical moment, using landscape as core imagery. Home is a place created by multi-modal expressions of self and its apprehension of the phenomena of sound and other sensory stimuli. World-earth-home and being-in the-world are synonymous with expressions of subjectivity in the world of objects. The poem recreates the process of becoming, the synthesis of sense-world, the improvising gesture in the space/place where 'synapses [are] thrown in the air':

*Play, dance, sing*

*Music: breathing of statues. Perhaps:  
silence of paintings...*

*audible landscapes*

*Musician, play; heartbeats, intervals  
of our synapses thrown into air;  
inside-out, our landscape - hear it?  
a rising and falling of breath,  
ground for quickenings  
that skip and bleat on hillpaths of desire.*

*Dance, move us in patterns we're part of:  
outside in, tidal shifts match our blood  
while song makes a game of grief:  
listen, we can give these cries a shape,*

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<sup>32</sup>Ostinato': from the Italian 'obstinate' or persistent. In musical terms it is 'the persistent repetition of a musical phrase either throughout the whole piece or episodically' (Otto Karolyi 1976: 105).

*turn bitterness to arabesque.*

*Play, dance, sing;  
a tree of joy puts out leaves  
with each struck note,  
and bending to offer us fruit, answers  
the same urge that brushes these strings.*

*Exiles, just stamping our feet  
we bring ourselves home.  
(unpublished 1996)*

**sounding 3**

**composing women in (their) place**

### **sounding 3**

### **composing women in (their) place**

### **(cassette #1)**

*...purposeful singing is what concerns most composers most of their lives (Aaron Copeland 1966: 2).*

Many Australian poets and composers, women and men, Indigenous and immigrant, have signified in their productions a sense of place, of earth-habitation. Through a multiplicity of signs they valorise an attunement to being-in-the-world that sheds traditions of artistic representation - the spectator's viewfinder - while subverting traditions of literary and musical form.

I will show in this chapter, through an examination of 'serious art music' by women composers, that women's art can refigure meaning away from the hierarchical binaries of essentialism and patriarchal conditioning by engaging with the lived experience of nature and emplacement. As I demonstrate too, motifs drawn from feelings about place enrich codes of expression for women composers, even within the formalist structures of Eurocentric tradition.

Improvisation, that age-old, momentarily and postmodern art, can deepen a sense of place in lived experience and exemplify, even through what might appear to be closed forms, spontaneous attunement to the moment-of-being. Postmodern expression has released an eclecticism that is freer of reductive constraints and diverse in product but the spontaneous intention still resides, though often not articulated, in art of a more formal, traditional and 'serious' mode. The potential for improvisation lurks within any

creative act and can continue to re-invent the piece long after its notation. While postmodern art captures more of the spirit of the improvisatory intention, I suggest that as *creativity is improvising*, an expressed relationship with place/nature, especially for women and even within traditional forms, invigorates and resounds to that intention.<sup>1</sup>

Apprehension of place, for women artists is, as I have argued, an encounter that is deeply felt within the body and voiced to and from the sense of sacred or profane outside and within it, to the love (or hate) of place: to what we witness in place. The speaking subject is revealed too in a palimpsest of signifiers, unconscious and conscious, sonic and textual. How we attempt to render the circularity of experiencing and subjectivity in metaphor, symbol, words and musical elements, those referential codes of meaning implicit in communication and lived-body awareness, is an expression of indwelling place-encounters and of cultural codes.

As artists we are not desiring transcendence, through reference to theology, or thealogy,<sup>2</sup> or an idea of the holy - although that may also

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<sup>1</sup>Due to insufficient time and space I am not able, as I had intended, to explore examples of popular musics (including Aboriginal musics) which, through improvisatory gestures, express attunement to place and becoming. My decision to select these five composers came after a long search, much listening and a growing awareness that they more truthfully represent my own lived experience as a musician 'brought up' on the traditions of Classical formalism and Christian hymnody. In many respects, to refer only to popular musics that have kept close to improvisatory forms would have been too obvious and unnecessary, given the amount of research that already exists. To rephrase *New Music Australia* presenter John Crawford's comments at the opening of the *ABC Improvisatory Music Awards* (ABC FM April 21, 1999): intended improvisation in serious art-music is experiencing a revival after nearly a century of suppression by rigid formalism (Absolutism), whereas jazz and other generic forms of improvisatory music have kept their treasured traditions alive [even if limited by idiomatic styles and canonisation].

<sup>2</sup>'Thealogy': a feminist term to deconstruct the patriarchal dominator model of all theistic religions. It was coined by Naomi Goldberg 'to refer to reflection on the meaning of the symbol of Goddess' (quoted by Carol Christ in Gunew 1991: 302).

be signified - but expressing habitation within place: em-placement. Such creative resonances bring together the spiritual (as transcendent and unknowable) with the tangible sensing of phenomena. Transcendent (object?) and immanent (body?)<sup>3</sup> meet and merge in a space that is (potentially) free from dichotomous language. As Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Grosz observe, the body is our means towards the end-of-being, towards integrated knowing, in any concept of subjectivity:

*The point is that we are not disembodied subjects, consciousnesses distinct from bodies. Our psychologies and subjectivities are bounded by our morphologies, the psychical and libidinal relations we have to our bodies. The body as lived is what constitutes subjectivity, and structures and organizes consciousness. This implies that there cannot be one or even two kinds of subject, but many different kinds, bounded not simply by the biological body but by necessary social and individual signification (1991: 366).*

Knowledge of sacred place then is expressed through an emplaced corporeity, through morphologies.<sup>4</sup> By signifying reverence for the world itself, though they may not fully understand the meaning of that reverence, these artists sense that 'the humble stuff surrounding us affords a likely enough habitation for the sacred, even

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<sup>3</sup>'Transcendent' and 'immanent' are philosophical terms associated with maleness and femaleness respectively (especially in Nietzsche's system and in religious-system hermeneutics of Biblical writings). Deleuze and Guattari have attempted to merge these two poles in their system of 'becoming-woman', to me an 'immanent' and, arguably, 'sexist' concept but, nevertheless, 'a reconstruction of the Body without Organs' which, they say, men take on in the act of writing. It is a 'be-between', where we never cease to 'become'. Although this theory appropriates feminality and could be seen as a phase to 'pass through' towards 'becoming-imperceptible', it begins, like phenomenology, to free philosophy from duality (see Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 35-60 and 1987: 276-279).

<sup>4</sup>'Morphology' is a term used by Irigaray to refer to ways in which the body and anatomy of each sex is lived by the subject and represented in culture. A psycho-social and signifiatory concept, it replaces the biologism and essentialism of notions of 'anatomical destiny' pervasive in psychoanalysis. For Irigaray, 'it is not women's anatomies but the psychical and social meanings of women's bodies within patriarchy that are seen as castrated...If discourses and representations give the body its form and meaning, then feminist struggles must direct themselves to the representational or symbolic order which shapes women's bodies only in the (inverted) image of men' (Grosz 1989: xxi).

now'.<sup>5</sup> In feminist terms, they also demonstrate a continuum of female experience (morphology) while expressing a diversity that belies the idea of essentialism that is implicit in androcentric dichotomies.

## non-closure and interrelatedness

There are many markers to mapping art-impulses, and I want to argue that two signifiers can help to chart the mythopoetic impulses in works by women composers who respond to land and/or who use improvisatory gestures. *Non-closure* and *interrelatedness* can be keys to reading difference and diversity in the work of women composers.<sup>6</sup> While it would be essentialist and absurd to argue that all women composers use non-closure and interrelatedness as signatures, I would suggest that these textures may be implicit in feminine writing because they come from the morphology of the writing/composing subject, from experience, and from conscious and unconscious resonance. They reflect the corporeal and become a multiplicity of meanings for all participants because: the endings (middles and beginnings) are left to the imagination of the listener/reader to construct for herself (from her own body of

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<sup>5</sup>Scott Cairns says that 'the new writing is a provocative assertion that this is the turn American literature in the twenty-first century will take, a post-post-modern turn towards the natural world, the wilderness, as an empowering scene of encounter with what Coleridge would have called the *pre-phenomenal*, what we will entertain here as the sacred' (1996: xiii). While this comment is infected with the Romantic notion of place as 'sublime and the binarisms of representation, I agree with Cairns that the 'post-post-modern turn' in the arts is showing a deep engagement with place that reflects a search for more than the framed and romanticised legacy.

<sup>6</sup>In her PhD thesis, Macarthur, has argued that a feminist aesthetic is more open and elusive, so that 'readings taken in the feminist, postmodern spirit, insist on the possibility of multiple readings and thus veer away from the modernist conception of the composer/text as central to the analysis, in turn, yielding a unitary explanation' (1997: 372).

knowing);<sup>7</sup> because the composer may intuitively configure the work as non-teleological; because continuing dialogue with body/self/other is the *palim-plus* on which she imprints her self; and perhaps because, to use the Deleuze/Guattari system, in writing we become-woman in order to eventually become-imperceptible, which may be the no-space, the 'between' and the light of the Buddhist Mother.

The question of whether we become anything in creativity is peripheral to the central figures of interrelatedness and non-closure which I want to argue can signify women's writing and the participant's propensity to indwell the moment of creativity. Often the form of the piece gives clues to these possible deeper meanings. While it may loosely follow Classical or Modernist<sup>8</sup> rules - particularly for women composers who, for career purposes (and in default of female equivalents), have been apprenticed to very visible, Modernist, male composers - I want to suggest that the work often subverts those processes by signifiers of non-closure and interrelatedness. Whether through 'feminine endings'<sup>9</sup>, tonal uncertainty, rhythmic

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<sup>7</sup>While language signifiers produce unstable signifieds with many possible meanings, musical signifiers are extremely abstract and self-referential, creating a far more open system. As Hazel Smith suggests, bringing these two systems together in a 'non-hierarchical relationship', particularly through improvisation and new technologies as she does, allows 'possibilities for semiotic exchange...between language and music, so that each domain is extended' (in Macarthur & Poynton 1999: 129).

<sup>8</sup>I use the terms Classical and Modernist here in the categorical sense: that is, as signifiers for developmental thought in musical history. However I am aware that the time lines intersect and overlap with preceding and emerging classifications. Modernism shares many features with postmodernism and Romanticism but for my purposes here it signifies a break with the old. Modernist music is also called 'Absolutist' because it is complete in itself - 'composed simply as music' - without needing to refer to literature, nature, experience etc (see Scholes 1977: 2). It represents the peak of patriarchal, post-Enlightenment achievement in the arts: mind over matter. However, there were sub-periods and variations within Modernism for which 'Absolutism' can be too reductive as a descriptive term, as radical literary criticism demonstrates. (See for example Roger Fowler 'Literature as Discourse' in K. M. Newton (ed) 1993: 125). Postmodernism in the arts, while continuing many Absolutist values in education, has made room for multiple meanings and the expression of existential and phenomenological experiences.

<sup>9</sup>'Feminine endings' have been taught in Western music education to mean suggestive and unresolved cadences rather than closure that is definite and climactic. 'Usually the final chord



shifts, cyclic or wave-like form, repetition, suggested timelessness, non-linear narrative, subverted notational forms, atypical performance presentation or unified participation,<sup>10</sup> these signs can suggest a subversion of the Modernist project<sup>11</sup> (addressing 'the question of women's autonomy from male definition' (Grosz 1989: xi), and, directly or indirectly, an exploration, often intuitively, of aspects of femininity. As Hazel Smith observes, for her the creative process is 'a mix of conscious and unconscious processes' (personal communication, March 25, 1999), a reminder that subverting (and honouring) the process is a deeply layered, psychological intention often beyond the grasp of the creator at the time of creation and open to multiple meanings<sup>12</sup> through resonance from the audience, and, later, from the creator as well.

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of a cadence falls on an accented beat; sometimes, however, the effect of the cadence is softened by bringing its final chord on an unaccented beat, and the cadence is then spoken of as a Feminine Cadence ('Feminine Perfect Cadence', 'Feminine Interrupted Cadence', and so forth)' (see Scholes 1977: 145).

<sup>10</sup>Composer Liza Lim, for example, who resists traditions of closure and 'concert hall', observes of one of her orchestral pieces (a form in which she says she deliberately 'optimises listening experience' by having it performed in a concert hall) that it is 'holistic' because it renders the orchestra as one voice rather than as many voices competing for expression. Each instrument complements the others by extending the motifs and sentences 'like a relay' (from an interview with Andrew Ford, *Australian Music Show* ABC RN, March 21 1999). Lim says too that a theme in her work has been the labyrinth, 'as a structural model for the multiplication of possibilities and as a non-narrative mode of thinking in which several perspectives might co-exist, and for the sense of mystery embodied in its "quest" motif: eg, rites of passage, ceremonies of ritual death and rebirth' (in *Sounds Australian* Winter 1992: 25).

<sup>11</sup>Macarthur sums up the Modernist (or Absolutist) project as one which 'entails legislating for a prohibition of cultural readings of musics on the grounds that such readings deflect from the music itself. In music and Musicology (certainly in Australia...) these attitudes continue to prevail in abundance. There is no question that modernists are threatened by inclusive approaches, for if they were to admit that such approaches are permissible, they too, would find themselves in the margins' (1996: 381).

<sup>12</sup>In the discourse of musical semiotics there is a spectrum of signifiers between thought and feeling (head and heart). Clearly what one person may find to be intellectually suggestive in a Beethoven symphony may be emotionally received by another listener. However, as Westerners are conditioned to the constraints put in place by post-Enlightenment patriarchal rules of musical language ('semiotics of desire, arousal and sexual pleasure [which] postpone gratification', as McClary suggests (1991: 9, 13)), I would argue that the diversity within this spectrum has been reduced by a lack of access to the music of women composers, who may give more expression to their multiple selves than their male counterparts, allowing for more hermeneutic possibilities and diversity of audience participation.

To engage here too with the discourse of improvisation, I would argue that music which overtly reflects the improvising intention provides a space for women composers to signify non-closed and relational gestures: elements and signs which express a feminist and feminal sensibility. When invited to comment on these signs in her work, feminist improviser-poet Hazel Smith said:

*I think non-closure and interrelatedness are absolutely central to my work!! My motto is: everything connects to everything else" - the idea of interrelatedness is fundamental to my whole aesthetic!! My texts involve intricate metonymic networks in which everything interrelates (personal communication 25.3.99).*

To suggest that women composers, poets and improvisers share non-closure and interrelatedness is not to suggest essentialist figurings but rather desire<sup>13</sup> that is, openness to multiplicity and the space between the constraints of form/al composition: a spiral of meaning-becomings, joinings and jouissance.<sup>14</sup> And even un-becomings in order to be-becomings.

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<sup>13</sup> Desire, or 'lack' in Freudian terms, is an unfulfilled and ever-changing demand that, as Teresa Brennan observes, is 'inextricably bound in speech and language' (in Gunew (ed), 1991: 125). However, as Grosz points out, psychoanalysis is predicated on the maxims of masculinist performance: 'There is only...masculine libido; there is only desire as an activity ("activity" being, for Freud, correlated with masculinity), in which case, the notion of female or feminine desire is self-contradictory'. Grosz 'rethinks' desire using theories of Spinoza, Deleuze, Guattari and Lingis, so that feminine desire is 'an intensity, enervation, positivity, or force...' (1995: 177; 178). Translated to creativity then, the act of writing, composing or improvising is the force which expresses self (selves) and a range of possible interpretations in the moment of production rather than a striving for an impossible and teleological completion.

<sup>14</sup>I borrow 'jouissance' here as Kristeva deploys it from the French meaning: the bliss of corporeal pleasure (see Grosz 1989: xix; Kristeva 1974: 63).

## postmodern production

By playing with motifs and gestures in multiple ways, the reader/listener and creator are subverting boundaries imposed by conventional genre, just as this thesis attempts to re-present that intention. In this sense, postmodernism as a term becomes obsolete, as improvisation is a set of events that exists before, during and after time and within the space of the moment. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, 'What counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body as it in fact is, as a thing in object space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal "place" defined by its task and situation' (quoted in Madison 1981: 29). Through disrupting the Modernist project (including sediment jazz structure<sup>15</sup>) which upholds 'the new', Absolute form and completeness, non-closed, postmodern composition/improvisation by contrast is open to multiple meanings, unconfined by Modernist parameters and diverse in its intention and derivation. In phenomenological terms, each improvising gesture represents (and is) a moment-of-being where the subject is free to honour her own intention by responding both to her own sounds-in-the-world and to the sounds of others. As I attempt to demonstrate, women composers who work in formalist ways still

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<sup>15</sup>According to recent popular music research, jazz in America is obsessed with canonising 'classical Jazz' rather than continuing the innovative for which jazz has historically been an overarching metaphor in Western society. Duke Ellington (the greatest composer of the twentieth century according to musicologists Stuart Nicholson and John Clare) and his collaborator Billy Strayhorn, are remarkable because they refused to be constrained by jazz or Modernist boundaries and because they kept the improvising intention alive in their work. That they were black is not insignificant to their absence from the canon of twentieth century composition studied in music schools, nor is it surprising that their work has emerged from the ghetto (interview by Louise Adler: Stuart Nicholson and John Clare, ABC RN, April 30, 1999. See also Stuart Nicholson's book: *Reminiscing in Tempo: A Portrait of Duke Ellington*. (Chicago: North East University Press 1999).

Jazz however is a broad term, and as jazz critic Peter Newton (in *Sounds Australian* #52, 1998: 38) suggests, there are many examples of 'cross-fertilisation' or 'fusion' with other musical genres: world music, environmental, rock etc, which subvert the retrograde jazz movement.

deploy improvisatory gestures which enliven their work and point to (possibly implicit) codes of interrelatedness and non-closure. In the following pages, Miriam Hyde's work is the most obvious example of this argument.

Improvisation in my own work could signify ever-becoming, cyclical patterns, intertextuality and relationality. These configuration potentialities have emerged during the process of composition, improvisation, performance and recording, and from reflective indwelling during and after the events by participants, myself included. The sonorities are still in process. The syntax of *Sonic Arc* signifies that hermeneutic potential is evolutionary.<sup>16</sup> As Derrida says, 'texts always say more than they can control' (quoted in Grosz 1988: x).

Not surprisingly, given feminists' concern for disrupting the patriarchal fixtures of Otherness, interrelatedness, like space and closure/non-closure, has emerged as important semiotic territory for feminists. As Macarthur suggests, quoting first from Grosz:

*'...feminist theory is critically engaged with the question of language and representation in their material and positive effects' [so] that there is not the gulf between the space of the subject and object (that is often portrayed) but rather a continuity and interrelatedness (Grosz 1988: 100 quoted in Macarthur 1997: 199).*

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<sup>16</sup>The score of *Sonic Arc* (1996) shows a line that appears to be endless both at the beginning and end of the piece and as a thread throughout it. This line, to signify the female voice that functions as a ground, moves in and out in waves, suggesting both continuity and discontinuity due to cultural suppression and changing awareness of and by self. Other readings since its inscription and recording suggest female sexuality, the female archetype of the earth, omnipresent Goddess-Gaia, desire etc. Motifs are open to interpretation and act as signs for emerging experience in the moment of improvising. It is a mud-map for losing and finding yourself rather than a graph of definitive pinpoints.

It is my view that the music of women composers reflects this continuity and connection, as does the merging of body with place in lived experience, the interrelatedness of all life and abiotic objects, and non-closure as the non-teleological state-of-being. So perhaps it could be argued that interrelatedness reflects the 'spatiality' of the composing intention, and non-closure its 'temporality'. Temporality and spatiality jostle with and bleed between each other as signifiers of openness and connection explored in the moments of event-making, giving to women's composition an uncanny richness: what we might call, 'soundings ever-becoming sonority'.

## feminist musicology

Susan McClary, whose project is to uncover the uncanniness of musical composition for women and the feminisation implicit in most Music Analysis, predicates her discussion on her belief that musical expression is always political because it encodes the values of the dominant social class to such an extent that we (listener, music student, composer) assume this standard or norm to be 'absolute' and 'value free'. As I have argued earlier, music remains the most garrisoned art in patriarchal terms, the standard, the androcentric canon that projects and implies structures which exclude women's diversity of impulse from those domains. Women have turned to this canon in absence of their own, often unquestioningly assuming it to be their own because that is all there is,<sup>17</sup> to learn the models of

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<sup>17</sup>Judeo-Christian theology is an appropriate analogy here: women have been defined by patriarchal tenets to such an extent that many have been unable to see their own position of powerlessness. Yet ironically, within these structures they have created communities which have kept alive the churches that oppress them and as congregations decline women are gaining access to clerical positions.

harmony, metaphor and structure or risk being shelved into silence. Macarthur argues that by following McClary's innovative model of Music Analysis - which 'reintroduces the body, meaning and emotion into the somewhat sterile sub-field' (1997: 192) - it is possible to read women's music as expressing femininity, *even when* designed on Western traditions<sup>18</sup> of patriarchal closure. She says that McClary 'rescues the 'feminine' from music and also uncovers ways in which male/female subjects are constituted by the music itself' (194).<sup>19</sup> However, Macarthur observes that while uncovering contrasexual subjectivities McClary is not reducing creativity to essentialism:

*McClary makes repeated references throughout the entire output of her writings to the idea that 'difference' within 'difference' is an important consideration (that is, that numerous differences arise from the contexts in which human beings live, including class, sexuality, religion, ethnic background and so on) (1997: 194).*

Beauty aesthetics in the arts and nature are a feminisation of the difference that patriarchy has exaggerated through representation. The issue for many experimental women composers, as Macarthur points out, is one of struggling against this beauty aesthetic. A woman can look beautiful singing or playing a superb melody but to create a work which asks political questions (as in Moya Henderson's *Sacred Site*), allows for spiritual reflection (Anne Boyd's *Angklung*),

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<sup>18</sup>'Tradition' is a slippery concept. Composer Pierre Boulez suggests that 'tradition quickly becomes mannerism' while English folk musicians Eliza and Martin Carthy observe that tradition is constantly evolving and that a 'traditional' song will never be sung the same way twice: it lives in the moment of performance. (Interviews with Andrew Ford, *Australian Music Show*, ABC RN April 10, 1999).

<sup>19</sup>As already mentioned, McClary has been criticised by Bruce Johnson (1995: 243) for continuing a formalist approach to Music Analysis through score analysis that perpetuates the privileging of serious art-music over popular musics. While the issue of exposing the unfairness of class hierarchies in the arts is of utmost importance, so too is the issue of the domination by men of women's art and lived experience through the insidious subtleties of signifying systems.

or represents a search for healing by being located within damaged space (Ros Bandt's *Mungo*), challenges the status quo and often meets resistance from those who prefer to stay comfortable and familiar within the 'closure' of the 'beautiful Classics'.

## five composers

As a prism for foregrounding women's music as difference and to demonstrate that the improvisatory impulse, interrelatedness and non-closure can be markers for uniqueness, unity and the space between genders, I want to look now at five composers whose work resonates to the natural world: the rigours, rhythms and roundness of nature, its interrelatedness and perennial metamorphosis. I believe it is possible to hear a morphology of place in music by women composers which deconstructs (albeit often unwittingly) while recreating. These works reflect the material they draw on, demonstrating that nature and emplacement can sustain creativity (and vice-versa) by sounding interrelatedness and non-closure through improvisatory impulse. The section which follows begins with a brief and general view of Australian composition that calls on landscape and emplacement in order to situate historically the women composers I have selected for closer scrutiny.

## historical context

The face of Australian-European composition has changed greatly since the nineteenth century, when soiree songs and Alfred Hill's

Romantic symphonies resonated to imperialist images, British<sup>20</sup> nationalism, and programmatic representations of the sublimity or beauty of nature. A historiographic reading of Modernist composition, however, reveals metaphors of land and appropriated Aboriginal motifs (particularly following the Jindyworobaks in poetry<sup>21</sup>) in the work of composers such as Clive Douglas, Arthur Loam, John Antill, Mirrie Hill, Alfred Hill, Margaret Sutherland and James Penberthy.<sup>22</sup> These works, which perhaps, like the Jindyworobak poems, sprang from a genuine desire for accuracy and Australian signature, today seem cloying, patronising and appropriating. They revealed the deeply embedded scopophilia central to the politics of discovery and ownership, and the continuing feminisation and stereotyping of bush and desert experiences that accompanied the colonial project. Composers such as these were attempting to write a new nationalism in music by representing the landscape through Aboriginal and ecological motifs with little understanding or experience of the deep world those motifs and symbols represented or of the people who

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<sup>20</sup>The composer Fritz Hart (1874-1949) spoke for many of his generation when he wrote: 'Float with flag unfurled/ A new Britannia in another world' (in Judith Pickering *Temenos* 1995: 24).

<sup>21</sup>The mythological world of the "Jindyworobaks" (spawned in the 1930s by poet Rex Ingamells and based on an Arrernte word meaning 'joining') grew out of adolescent Australia, under a cloud of war in Europe, looking for expression of the human spirit in the images of their own country...Rex Ingamells and his co-patriots supported poetry as the 'national desseratum' producing a 'wild, bright, fresh, music' (see andrea breen, *Figuring the Land: Land as Archetype in Australian Poetry*, Department of English, University of Tasmania, Honours Thesis, 1994). See also Brian Elliot (ed) *The Jindyworobaks* Portable Australian Authors, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press 1979).

Roslynn Haynes suggests that 'Ingamells falls into the Western mode of attempting to account for this visionary experience [secular conversion associated with experience in the desert evoked in the poems] through stereotyped notions of immensity, antiquity and changelessness of the desert, citing the "magnificent beauty" of Uluru, its immense age, its "timeless Being" [and] "a Past so distant/that Man is but a perilous dream of Nature"' (1999: 269).

<sup>22</sup>James Penberthy deserves a mention here for his determination to immerse himself in Aboriginal culture and for his respect for its structures. His music demonstrates this genuine respect as well as the impact by European culture on Indigenous peoples. He writes: 'But Australian composers have to live at home where they are a part of the sky, sea and land - amongst their own people. Composers cannot be international. I hopped on the next boat for home [from London] and spent the next twenty-seven years in Western Australia learning about Australia' (*Sounds Australian* Winter 1991: 23).



lived by them. The colonial, Euro-centric impulse in the arts is evident in these words by Clive Douglas:

*[T]he brown man's chant is no ready-made melody but rather a motif - the germ of a musical idea yet undeveloped. He knows no harmony and the mono-tonal sounds of his chant are at a pitch unmusical and undiatonic. The intervals of his chant are something less than the tones and semitones of our musical system and follow a pattern of repetition without much invention...the primitive rhythms, beaten out on spears and boomerangs, give a monotonous regularity of the most elementary accent. How then can a composer utilise such crude material? (quoted in Pickering 1996: 3).*

This uninformed view of Indigenous culture led poets and composers to appropriate place, language, culture and musical elements in what could only be called 'patronising' ways while their representations of nature, Indigeneity and women were dyed in the fluids of alterity.

Since the 1960's however, with the rise of ecological and regional concerns, a more informed sensibility has sought to affirm Indigenous rights to land ownership, by honouring their musics through dialogue and sharing, and to express issues of ecological sustainability. Indigenous people themselves have increasingly used a diversity of musics (and poetry) to express their sense of injustice, belonging in country, and hope for a wider respect for their belonging to sacred place.<sup>23</sup>

There has been a growing determination by art-music composers to express the personal and collective dilemma of the desire for a motherland/fatherland for non-indigenous Australians as well as to

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<sup>23</sup>See Marcus Breen (ed) 1989 *Our Place, Our Music* Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

honour Indigenous voices through respectful sonorities and metaphor. It is fair to say that the landscape of Australian composition now has multi-racial overtones and undertones. As Linda Kouvaras observes:

*One of postmodernism's about-faces in terms of artistic attitudes is the rehabilitation of ethnic memory as a vital part of personal identity. It is no longer necessary to cease to be Jewish, or black, or Italian, or Australian, or anything* (in Caitlin Rowley (ed) 1998: 55).

Despite the unevenness of the playing field (for Indigenous artists and immigrants) and the ever-present glass ceiling for women in this 'about-face', there has been a significant merging of cultural contexts in the arts community. Even before the term 'postcoloniality' gained currency,<sup>24</sup> composers had begun to look to the pacific rim for metaphors and ideas for instrumentation.<sup>25</sup> While it could be argued that 'borrowing' has associated ethical problems, appropriating Asian musics has enlarged a sense of Australian regional identity and personal identification away from the European avant-garde<sup>26</sup> and Classical traditions. Peggy Glanville-Hicks'

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<sup>24</sup>Peter Barry observes that the term 'postcoloniality' wasn't coined until the 1990s even though the issues of identity that it refers to were voiced long before this. It is a moot point whether the term reflects the culture that now exists or a fantasy of a nation that has left the evils of imperialism behind. As Australia is a white nation as the result of imperialism, it will remain 'colonial' for as long as Indigenous nations are in a position of marginalisation (see Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* Manchester: University Manchester Press 1995: 191; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* London: Routledge 1994; Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge *Dark Side of the Dream* North Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1990).

<sup>25</sup>Anne Boyd for example, uses a Japanese instrument, the shakuhachi, in her piece *Meditations on a Chinese Character*. However, a far more sustained thread through her career has been an 'Asian sound' (harmonically, rhythmically and melodically) produced on European orchestral instruments. Many of the titles, dedications and epigraphs have Asian contexts. *Red sun, chill wind* for flute and piano is 'based on a haiku by the famous Japanese poet Basho' and *String Quartet no.1: tu dai oan - the fourth generation* for 2 violins, viola, violincello is dedicated 'To the people of Vietnam' (see AMC list of works by Anne Boyd, April 30, 1999).

<sup>26</sup>'Avant-garde' is another slippery term. It has attracted an historical association - late Modernism's passion for 'the New' and postmodernism as the end of the old avant-garde - but, as Smith and Dean suggest, it 'may establish itself partly by institutionalising a separation between itself and the rest of society' which can exist at any time because 'the

percussive and Indian-inspired sonorities have made an impact on Australian audiences and her contribution to the development of Australian Music has now been acknowledged as significant.<sup>27</sup> Anne Boyd, Peter Sculthorpe, Richard Meale, Barry Conyngham, Helen Gifford, Sarah de Jong, Moya Henderson, Judith Clingan and Ross Edwards are all known for their strong identification with the musics of Asia and/or Aboriginal themes. For Anne Boyd and Ross Edwards this awareness has been integral to an inner searching.<sup>28</sup> Peter Sculthorpe, Australia's most well known composer, paved a way for many by refusing to continue to meet expectations of the European avant-garde - with its disregard for Indigenous musics - deliberately choosing to look instead to Indonesian and Aboriginal musics for source material which, he would argue, was out of respect rather than appropriation. Repetition, a marker in his work that is also a feature of the musics of the Asia region, was banned, he says when he was a student in London in the 1940s and 50s. Sculthorpe, whose 'personal voice speaks through in all pieces', chose not only to repeat motifs but to revisit old pieces so that the 'same kinds of lines of

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audience or society at large may identify artistic endeavours as separated, impenetrable or extreme' (1997: 18). However, the meaning of 'avant-garde' when linked to 'European' in this thesis refers to a pre-postmodern exclusivity.

<sup>27</sup>James Murdoch in a recent address (*New Music Forum* broadcast on *New Music Australia* ABC FM, March 31, 1999), spoke of Peggy Glanville-Hicks' diverse influences on Australian music: her composing which deconstructed the harmonic traditions of Western music and celebrated the rhythms and linearity of Asian Music, her generosity - donating her house in her will for use by aspiring composers - and her contribution as a constructive and honest music critic in New York.

<sup>28</sup>Ross Edwards' music resonates with the central themes for this thesis: he draws together the spiritual (largely through utilising elements from Oriental traditions) and sense of place. As he says, 'in almost every religion, there is so much essence that is the same, but it has to come from within and without, in relationship with the environment. Otherwise you just read texts and it's all second hand experience and not real. The real sacred experiences that are important to me are conveyed musically'. His music, as Pickering his interviewer suggests, is 'non-linear, non-narrative, reflect[ing] no process of thematic development...no sense of drama. Instead it presents and evokes the experience of being and stillness in the natural movement of the cosmos' (see *Temenos* #2 1995: 56). Edwards also says that 'all my music is trying to find some ritual that makes sense', whether as 'sacred' or 'maninya' (dance-like) (see Paul Stanhope in *Sounds Australian* Autumn 1993: 21 ).

song appear and reappear'. He calls these motifs 'my Kakadu song lines' and observes that they 'keep reappearing' in never quite the same guise, creating his 'oeuvre of one'. He admits to being most influenced by the champion of Modernism, poet T.S. Eliot, and, like many postmodern artists, to recreating the 'sublime' as far as possible in his works.<sup>29</sup>

Composer Pierre Boulez observed that tradition turns too quickly into a 'series of mannerisms'.<sup>30</sup> Composers like Sculthorpe and Peggy Glanville-Hicks have taken wide swings away from mannered traps by sounding their own experiences of Australian place and regional contexts although repeated gestures may be interpreted as mannerisms depending on point of view. On a note of feminist criticism, the ascent that Sculthorpe's career has taken for doing similar things to the 'recently discovered' (and still to many, 'obscure') Glanville-Hicks, is an example of the problematic of the uneven playing field. Sculthorpe is a household name; Glanville-Hicks had to be promoted directly and determinedly. Joining their names here brings me to make more political comments about the problems facing women composers in Australia by way of leading into more personal accounts.

outback or upfront?

Whether it is fashionable to do so, or because they are following the lead of their male counterparts, or that they need to express their

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<sup>29</sup>Taken from interviews with Andrew Ford for Peter Sculthorpe's seventieth birthday, *Australian Music Show* ABC RN, April 10, April 24, 1999.

<sup>30</sup>Andrew Ford, *Australian Music Show* ABC RN, April 10, 1999.

own participation in place and nature, or because, to use essentialist and arguably political terms, women and nature have an unspoken affinity, contemporary women composers in Australia often signify a sense of place and nature in their music. To some composers, like Sarah Hopkins, the cosmos is central to creative expression, providing the habitat for a flourishing creativity; for others, like Ros Bandt, the intention is multi-faceted and political, incorporating ecological consciousness-raising objectives, intertextuality and community cooperation. For still others, as in my work, composition is a synthesis of sound-word signifiers with a political inflection, while for multi-media artists like Hazel Smith, transition from places of childhood to imagined lands of the future (signified, arguably, by the space of the hypermedia studio) is integrated into a larger feminist schemata and postmodern production.

But for women composers the white, middleclass, 'malestream' shield continues to prevent their work, diverse and exciting as it is, from appearing on the stage and broadcast arena. It is ironic but not surprising that so many women composers look to the land for inspiration because with nature they share a common oppression and fight for survival. To tell the story of growth for most women composers in Australia is to narrate one of harsh winds, denuded soil and competition with tall strong saplings so that their true selves and deepest creative impulses are often subsumed in order to fit the frame of conformity. As Gretchen Miller, a (then) composition student at New South Wales Conservatorium of Music remarked:

*I am one of three women student-composers out of a total of seventeen...In this context it is often hard to be heard above the overbearing competition between the male students who are*

*trying to outdo each other to such an extent that I have developed a more assertive and aggressive manner to deal with this. Although this may be seen to be a positive development, I find it exhausting and frustrating and not at all conducive to my creativity (quoted in Radic, Sounds Australian Summer 1991-2: 9).*

As Macarthur observes in her critique of established composer Boyd's struggle with the garrison of male prejudice:

*Boyd is interesting, for while successfully negotiating the patriarchal structures in which she works as the Professor of Music at Sydney University, she also manages to circle around patriarchy, entering it at strategic moments, avoiding other aspects of it altogether and this is no more evident than in the works she produces as a composer. Boyd quite openly admits to sometimes having to 'play the "boy's" games' on the campus of the university. It is this which, I would argue, sometimes makes her ambivalent about feminism...[A]nother paradox [also] emerges because as a single parent she necessarily takes on the work of three adults (academic, composer, mother) without the support of a partner or an extended family (1997: 220).*

Macarthur argues that a feminist aesthetic in music survives despite the rigours of multiple role-playing and the 'rotten unlevel playing field' as Moya Henderson calls it (quoted in Ford 1993: 102). In the interviews I conducted with women it was evident that most of the women encountered hurdles because they were women, and that their lived experience as women filtered through to their musical representations. Composers who seem to be inoculated from patriarchal setbacks are fiercely determined, far ahead of their male colleagues in experimental or technical initiatives and often working closely with these associates as collaborators.<sup>31</sup> It is possible too that, like many women in the church, some have been

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<sup>31</sup>As I enlarge below (see p180), Australia's leading sound installation artist Ros Bandt is a good case in point here. In her own words: 'It [being a women composer] has never been a problem' (personal communication Melbourne, June 5, 1998).

less aware of the impact patriarchy has made on their creative lives because they have been immersed in and favoured by its traditions to such an extent that they have become insulated against injustice. But for most women composers the comments by musicologist Thérèse Radic resound to personal frustration:

*To hear only the creative voices of men is to hear with only one ear, to have half the choir on stage, to know only half of the music we might have known, and indeed, perhaps to have denied ourselves access to forms that were more truly bound to us than men's have been (Sounds Australian, Summer 1991-2: 8).*

In the following section, which draws on interviews to support my thesis of a feminist aesthetic that identifies with place and deepened knowing from un-knowing, I attempt to show that through access to forms by women composers we can, as listeners and composers, experience sonorities that are 'more bound to us than men's have been'. For many reasons, women need women's voices to be heard and what better place to start than from within the cacophony where a sense of self-in-place and the moment of creativity vibrates. Men also need women's voices to be heard, and while this thesis adds little grist to Macarthur's political mill, I hope that by exploring works by some women through the phenomena of land and improvisation, the music of women as an expression of their lived experience will become more audible in the crowded clubrooms of patriarchy.

## reflections

Some of the obstacles I encountered during the process of interviewing were, in retrospect, blocks that are part of the same

dilemma: the unlevel playing field and the call of duty that makes a creative life for humans-built-into-a-female-body so fractured and elusive. My own struggles to be heard as a composer have also been directly or indirectly related to the garrison principle.

When I came to incorporate my own compositions into this thesis I came up against institutional regimes that made it difficult to have my exploratory forms acknowledged. My creativity was judged on the volume of notated work. I had more experience in performance than composition and the key to acceptance in the competitive composer market was seen in black and white terms: notes on the page. Frustrated by my male (serious art-music) colleagues who saw everything in terms of Structural Analysis, notation, computer jargon, and institutional rules, I intensified my interest in improvisation as a pathway to individual expression that would bypass generic expectations and speed up the creative process. I felt too that my imagination was limited by my writing skills and so for several months, concurrent with this deviation, I took composition lessons from experienced and distinguished composer Don Kay. These lessons were useful because Kay, though not interested in improvisation, is committed to encouraging freedom of expression. I eventually became disenchanted with institutional expectations and the absence of female voices and finally settled in the English Department where I was enthusiastically encouraged to write myself into my work. As a result of this disrupted process, compositional technique has been mostly self-taught and moving in literary domains has, while broadening the field, sidetracked my intentions. As a composer-improviser now, I have a strong sense of 'doing it alone' and of 'catching up with the boys' in my own way. The process has taken me



through rugged terrain at every turn and some of this process is exposed in the essay on my creative work in 'sounding 4'.

The long, rifted road has given me an understanding of the experiences other women have encountered pushing against the barriers. In the interviews which follow, the questions focus on the composers' use of landscape, nature and improvisation in the context of the fight by women composers to be heard.

## interviews

In order to draw from a sample of composers, I sent twelve letters<sup>32</sup> outlining my research, giving ten questions which could either be submitted as written answers or considered as a lead into a possible interview at a suggested time six weeks ahead.

In reply to my letters I received one letter answering all questions directly and agreeing to an interview; one telephone call declining an interview for logistic reasons but suggesting a later telephone call if I still required information; one postcard to arrange a definite interview, and, much later, one email response expressing a willingness to engage in further contact, though querying if her work was relevant.

During the proposed interstate visit for interviews, I phoned two composers who had not replied to my letter. Both these women refused interviews on the grounds of insufficient time and expressed

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<sup>32</sup>See appendix A.

disappointment that there was not more background supplied with my investigations. I had not in my letter mentioned that the research was part of a PhD thesis, thinking that by omitting this detail I might elicit more honest responses, a ploy that worked against me in these two cases. For one of these women the questions were 'irritating', a complaint later qualified as a perception due to stress from work overload; for the other, the questions were seen as too broad and vague.

## obstacles

I was particularly keen to talk to these composers (Moya Henderson and Anne Boyd) as I held their work in high regard and admired them both for the fight they had made 'to the top' and for the encouragement they had given to fledgling composers floundering under the glare of the garrison's success. Both these composers are of high standing in the composing community, *almost*, it would appear, irrespective of gender. They have each received accolades for innovative work, and are frequently broadcast, recorded and commissioned by the ABC and other organisations (though not as often as their male counterparts). Despite their apparent visibility however, both women are known for a feminist stance, and for giving voice to issues such as insufficient broadcasts or concert programming by the ABC or new music festivals for what could only be called 'gender reasons'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Moya Henderson, who has been particularly vocal on this issue, refused to attend the *Musica Nova Festival* in Brisbane in 1990. Writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* she says: 'There are, however, no works by Australian women composers listed for performance - no, not a single one. So will someone please explain to Sofia [Gubaidulina - composer from Russia] how things are in this country and mention in passing that Australian women composers do

Negative responses from these two women to my call for an interview could be associated with the tall poppy syndrome. They had reached the pinnacle of their careers, been rewarded for it with recognition, yet were hesitant to make themselves available for interviews by a composer/researcher who didn't seem at first to fit academic (traditional) expectations.

As Macarthur points out in her study, less than 1% of women composers in Australia have their music performed or broadcast (and women composers represent roughly 18% of the composers represented at the Australian Music Centre) (1997: 44). In order to be celebrated with 'malestream' names, a woman must attain a patriarchal function by taking on positions in academia or in the composing 'fraternity' so that she will be seen to be competing with her male colleagues and therefore 'successful'. This mind-set filters down to interactions with others so that lesser women can be given short shrift, particularly if they do not appear to be playing the institutional game.

As so few women are composing, this dilemma is compounded: the few successful ones can become territorial and precious towards their achieved domains. It is a reflection too of education as the pedagogical models are male, and women/girls are not encouraged to

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exist. I won't be going to the Festival. While its organisers in at the ABC Sydney concert department continue to boycott Australian women's music, I'll just have to 'girlcott' their festivals' (see copy, August 10, 1990, AMC library). At the *Australian Women's Music Festival* (Sydney, October 1997; originally named the *Composing Women's Festival*), Anne Boyd was similarly scathing about the ABC's reluctance to program work by women, including her own. It was clear from the comments by all women at the poorly attended Festival and Conference that the Festival would have been unnecessary had they felt less marginalised. Do we ever hear of 'Composing Men's Festivals'? (see Radic in Macarthur & Poynton 1999: 12-15).

take up this mode of expression, despite policies of gender equality. Institutions require, as Gretchen Miller observes, 'assertiveness and aggression' to be heard. Lack of encouragement and opportunity may not be direct but subtle and insidious, and as Edward de Bono<sup>34</sup> would argue, women find it harder to 'persist' at writing poetry and music because it requires masculine attributes: aggressive determination and focus. The problem of making a career in composition accessible to women is, however, historically rather than biologically determined. If conservatorium teachers are aggressively determined and focused to begin with there is no model for more 'diffused'<sup>35</sup> ways of working. There is no genre of women's desire (in all its diversity of lived experience) to reach towards. Inevitably, a student feels daunted, as I did, when told her compositions are fragmented, circular, simple or unstructured (non-closed and interrelated) according to the traditions of Music Analysis. She chooses to keep firmly to the tracks of performance where there is clear ground for technique-attainment and a career as an orchestra player or teacher. (Both these careers suffer from the weight of patriarchy yet are known now to be accommodating to women's contributions by sheer weight of numbers). Or, as in my case, she moves sideways, to a field where there is more flexibility and more female presence. In the process of change, a creative woman often loses the impulse and ultimately falls in line with institutional guidelines: closure!

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<sup>34</sup>Recalled from an ABC FM interview with Margaret Throsby during 1995.

<sup>35</sup>Jungian analyst, Irene Claremont De Castillejo suggests that 'there is a very clear difference between the focused consciousness of mankind, and a diffused awareness...Focused consciousness has emerged over thousands of years...all our education is an attempt to produce and sharpen it in order to look at things and analyse them into their component parts...It is however not the only kind of consciousness. Most children are born with and many women retain, a diffused awareness of the wholeness of nature, where everything is linked with everything else and they feel themselves a part of an individual whole...Here is the wisdom of the artists...' (1990: 15).

Camille Paglia would argue that brilliant women go soft by marrying and taking up jobs ('reality-obsession') which diverts them from creative work.<sup>36</sup> I spoke to a recent conservatorium graduate who to me represented the average student emerging from musical training. This woman had never improvised (knowingly) and could not play any pieces without printed music in front of her. She had taken up philosophy in her final year of music studies because 'she couldn't wait to get out of the conservatorium'; she was teaching piano (unhappily) within Australian Music Examination Board guidelines<sup>37</sup> and investigating music therapy as a profession because it had more scope for enjoyment. Her training as a musician had reduced her intentions by steering them into institutionalised forms devoid of creativity.

For those few women who persist with composing in the face of all these institutional practices, the sense of what it took to get there is perhaps understandably dimmed and reduced by the energy it takes to gain recognition in an art overbalanced with masculinity and the scaffolds of modernity. (This is not to diminish the fights many 'unpowerful' men have had for acclaim nor the diversity within men's art expression, but that is not the issue here). Does the fight to be heard mean that along the battle tracks the music of these women

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<sup>36</sup>In an interview with Louise Adler (ABC RN, January 1999), Camille Paglia offered the 'reality' argument as a reason for the absence of female Mozarts and Jack-the-Rippers.

<sup>37</sup>Personal communication: name withheld for confidentiality. The Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) (for which I prepared students in violin, viola and theory for many years), while it encourages students to play does not encourage play-fullness but rather an assessment mentality which, I believe, manipulates creativity towards suppression of the impulse that set the student on the course in the first place. Music examinations perpetuate the pedagogical tradition in which student, orchestral player and teacher have no sense of joy in 'playing'. Speaking for my own music studies, I stopped playing the violin following the long grind of preparing for a Diploma in performance. Playfulness (and the desire to play) was rekindled several years later through falling in with folk musicians and poets and by rediscovering improvisation.

composers loses some of the vibrancy and vision it may have had? Has there been a selling out of the deeper meanings which gain form through expression in order to be seen and heard, particularly in light of the obsession our culture has for raising 'the few' to 'star' status? And is there a devaluing of a sense of being-in-the-world as female? And, in phenomenological terms, does the *inauthentic* overtake the *authentic*?

### critics in the garrison

Following the release of a recent recording by Anne Boyd, one of these composers in question, a critic suggested she had become more 'selfconscious' in her composing.<sup>38</sup> While this term is not pivotal to what I am arguing here, the attitude of the reviewer is worth considering in light of the institutional and cultural milieu which swamps women. There are several possible feminist responses to the sentiments of this review. A perceived 'selfconsciousness'<sup>39</sup> may have resulted from the composer's many previous attempts to slice through the market and 'be seen' while being heard, necessitating a more 'marketable' product which 'recycled' earlier material; alternatively, the piece may have been interpreted by the reviewer in Modernist terms: while attempting impartiality he was dictated to by the binaries of patriarchal presuppositions that devalued and

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<sup>38</sup>See *Sounds Australian* #51 (1998: 38) for this review of Anne Boyd's CD, *Meditations on a Chinese Character* (ABC Classics). Dench noted a 'shift in nostalgia' in Boyd's work but acknowledged that this could have been because it was using material from an earlier piece, *Angklung*.

<sup>39</sup>Ironically, 'selfconsciousness' is a term applied to Modernist writers (T S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf for example) to describe their experimentation with form yet when it comes to a woman composer moving away from what is perceived to be 'her distinctive style', the term is applied (by a composer whose work could be categorised as Modernist) in a negative and reductive rather than exploratory sense.

essentialised the feminality and uniqueness of the composer's creative impulse. I would argue that the reviewer in this case, while inadvertently touching on a feminist issue (how to be heard) which may have meant a loss of something special in this piece, did not try to fathom the deeper gestures of the composer's subjectivity nor the enormity of the *existential angst*, the fight and pain to be listened to, performed or recorded. In true Australian-American fashion, once a successful composer like Boyd gains recognition, she (usually he) gains 'icon' status, leaving the others in her/his wake. So the institutions which control audience participation (eg, the ABC, *Symphony Australia*, *Australian Chamber Orchestra*, all Conservatoria) repeat broadcasts and concert programs of the same piece<sup>40</sup> or similar pieces (and occasionally a new commissioned piece) by this composer and one or two other colleagues rather than works by emerging others until, and this is the point, a new piece by the 'icon' appears that upsets this iconography. It is seen as different (or re-invented) and labelled in a reductive jargon, as 'selfconscious'!

In the composer's CD notes for the piece under scrutiny - *Meditations on a Chinese Character* - Boyd comments on the piece's uncanniness. There is an interpenetration of past and present, represented by the trope of a previous piece, *Angklung*, and gestures of meditations on a Chinese character, the *Sheng*. All artists evolve a personal stamp which is largely a re-creation and extension of earlier forms and themes, and Boyd's reworked gestures are consistent with the

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<sup>40</sup> *Gold Fish in Summer Rain* and *As I Crossed the Bridge of Dreams* have been played many times on ABC radio, to the point where they have become synonymous with Anne Boyd's name. Given Boyd's dedication to composing for over thirty years, there are many other pieces to choose from (38 published pieces registered at the AMC library alone).

spiritual resonances circulating through all her work. She says of the piece:

*[It is]...above all, the idea of music as a vehicle for meditation, for tuning ourselves with each other as well as with the natural world of which we are a part...I have said elsewhere that for me, composition is essentially a spiritual exercise - each composition, deeply felt within the heart (conceived as the seat of emotions as well as the mind), marks another step in a spiritual journey towards the recognition and reconciliation of the essential godliness which is in us all (CD notes 1997).*

The reviewer may well have misunderstood this conceptual sense, a sense conceived, I would propose, from an impulse towards non-closure and interrelatedness, not from a desire to produce a commodity. He may have based his comments on masculinist assumptions and presuppositions of an icon's potential productivity. Many composers, including Boyd's teacher Sculthorpe, have reworked past material in other forms, contributing to what might be seen as an 'opportunist' mentality which generates writing for a particular 'market' and therefore almost certainly more selfconsciously and *inauthentically*. It is highly unlikely that a 'malestream' composer, Sculthorpe for example, would elicit a comment like 'selfconsciousness' from a reviewer of a work that re-presented past material, as most of his indeed does, or because a composer momentarily lost concentration on the higher values of art. A woman composer, whose career is unavoidably muddled by the 'malestream' traditions of composition, teaching, reviewing and career expectations, may at times need to compromise ideals if she wants direct recognition through performance, publication and recording.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Even for men, the issue of 'getting their piece played' and 'played well' is a constant concern. In conversation with Tasmanian composers Don Kay and Michael Jones these sentiments were repeatedly expressed. 'A bad performance', says Jones, 'can ruin the



At the opening of the review under question, Chris Dench, himself a composer and member of the Australian Music Centre Board,<sup>42</sup> is at great pains to foreground women composers, but his tone is so overtly positive that it comes across as patronising and condescending. The hierarchy of binaries that produced the attitude exemplified by Douglas's reductive comments towards Aboriginal musics (see above p157) is refigured in Dench's description of women composers:

*Now, nearly twenty years later [after the birth of post-modern musics], Australian society seems to have matured sufficiently for increasing numbers of women to regard a career as a composer as a viable option. As men have always arbitrated meaning in Western Art Music, only today is a radical woman composer thinkable, and even then men still do not (cannot?) recognize many of the most innovative aspects of women's music because its innovation is precisely in its assumption of a distaff ontology (in Sounds Australian #51, 1998: 38).*

While he recognises the 'distaff' assumptions women composers are up against, the tone of the article replicates the essentialist attitude he is condemning. It also presupposes that postmodern art (male construct?) allowed (radical) women composers into the ranks. It is then not surprising that a woman composer who has been seen to have 'done well for herself' can also be seen to be 'letting the side down' if she shows a chink in the armour or brilliance that got her there! And that chink can be perceived as repetition, selfconsciousness, commodification, simplicity or whatever else happens to flash through the mind of the reviewer at the time of

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piece's intention' (Hobart, September 1996). Given that a symphonic piece may take a year to write, this is an understandable concern but for most women composers the only time they hear their work may be through a midi (studio) production or 'ad hoc' with a group of students and friends.

<sup>42</sup>The Australian Music Centre (AMC) is the 'national organisation which collects, promotes and disseminates the works of Australian composers' (cover notes to *Sounds Australian*) and *Sounds Australian* is its biannual publication.

listening/writing because he is approaching the piece with 'essentialist' presuppositions.<sup>43</sup>

## diversity

During the interviews I found that despite the power dynamics of the institutional worlds within which they were operating, women are composing music which explores an intertextual, interdisciplinary context often celebrating the natural world and sense of place. As a 'reader' of their works, my interpretation is grounded in my own experience. My reading, in hermeneutic terms, is only one of multiple possibilities way beyond, or perhaps within, the intentions of the composer and contingent on my musical and lived experience. My interpretation also shifts with each successive listening experience. If the composers' intentions and my readings intersect, so much the better. That I may intuit moments of the composers' unconscious intention is also possible. The phenomena of each moment of listening reveals a kaleidoscope of enriching and evolving metaphors that are ever-becoming refrains.

To summarise then, the terrain of musical composition for women in Australia is crosshatched with ditches and cliffs. Miriam Hyde, Ros Bandt, Hazel Smith, Anne Boyd and Moya Henderson have each 'ploughed on' in the face of recognised and unrecognised deterrents.

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<sup>43</sup>A good example of a strong individual perceived as a genius in Australian composing circles is Elena Kats-Chernin. Her work is frequently performed, commissioned and recorded. She composes quickly for a required event or style, thereby fitting the category 'genius' within the Eurocentric traditions of Musicology, and outshines male colleagues through her speed and applied skills. I do not wish to devalue her experience and brilliant musicianship but criticise the milieu that raises her to icon status while refusing to acknowledge (or make known) the work of others.

What makes them appropriate here is representation of place or nature, a monastic space of their own from which to compose, and, the presence of an improvisatory intention that signifies a deep commitment to the moment-of-being-woman rather than to figurations of desire, climax and closure.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Susan McClary observes that from the seventeenth century in music, there were two 'erotic' metaphors driving composers' creativity: pleasure and desire. Pleasure was constructed through qualities of 'timelessness and suspended hovering' (often through employment of an *ostinato* (a repeating motif) or modal ambiguities) that denied 'the possibility or desirability of closure'. Desire though was constructed through 'its ability to instil in the listener an intense longing for a given event: the cadence...After the need has been established (...the unbearable absence...) tonal procedures strive to postpone gratification...until finally delivering the payoff in what is technically called 'the climax' which is quite clearly to be experienced as metaphorical ejaculation'. McClary notes that when these two erotic metaphors emerged they were gendered in performance: that is, images of pleasure/pain were uttered by women 'dissolving in her longing for a lover' and by many *ostinato* passages that were performed by female characters. If males partook of this discourse it was 'through giving themselves over to erotic stupor....Images of desire [however] were...wielded by male characters who could demonstrate their rationality, their rhetorical prowess and their ability to set long-term goals. And it is principally this set of images [rhetoric of desire and conquest] that wins out historically' to such an extent that they became universal in the century of Enlightenment (1991: 125-126).

## Miriam Hyde

When I visited Miriam Hyde in her home in Sydney in June 1998 to conduct an interview, my attention was immediately drawn to the prominence of two pianos in the sitting room. They signified a love of music but also the embodiment and territory of Miriam's musical life, indeed her whole life. With the unfolding of the interview it became clear that music was her language of loving, grieving and being-in-the-world and of reflection on the natural world.

Miriam Hyde could be called a living legend; a composer-in-a-female-body who has made consistent progress towards - and many would argue, has gained - mainstream acceptance. She has found ways to proceed against the stiff winds of institutionalised music-making and has successfully used bureaucracies, the foundations of harmony, the structures of Classical and Romantic form and the reverberations of Modernism to further her goals. While a statement like this may seem to be inconsistent with the themes of this thesis - the expression of difference in the face of patriarchal constructs - I want to suggest that Miriam Hyde's work transgresses these boundaries while staying within them. She does not shake off cadential structures to write her own signatures but finds ways of signifying her own voice while notating traditional forms.

Hyde has been composing for more than sixty years, and, in her mid eighties, though no longer still composing, still regularly performs and lectures on her works.<sup>45</sup> Born in 1913, Hyde has had 'one of the most

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<sup>45</sup>'Still' refers to June 1998. Subsequent contact with Hyde was postponed due to declining health.

remarkable careers in the Australian arts' She has been composer, pianist, author and poet as well as a recipient of many awards, including an OBE and Officer of the Order of Australia. In 1991-92, the year of her eightieth birthday, she was proclaimed 'International Woman of the Year' (Ann-Car Boyd, CD notes to *Miriam Hyde: Brownhill Creek in Spring*, 1993).

These accolades though well deserved tell us little of the phenomena that generated her vast output of music, or of the moods and images they signify. They presuppose too an easy rise to recognition when, as she expressed in her interview, there have been many struggles because she is a woman. She said that the world was 'not used to women composers' and that being a woman has been a 'handicap' to publication.<sup>46</sup> She considered her music to be 'conservative but a happy medium between older major and minor [forms] and [the] new contemporary music' (personal communication 4.5.98). She may have been able to gain more recognition as a woman by writing music which fell between the categories of Classical/Romantic and Modern at the time she was writing, so that the mainstream could resonate to her traditional inflection while the 'new' could make their own subjective interpretations. As a 'between' composer she represents the struggle for recognition as a woman - demonstrated by her appropriation and subversion of canonical styles - but also the liminal source of 'inspiration', as she composed from her experience of being-in-the-world and a sense of being-at-home.

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<sup>46</sup>Hyde gave an example from Margaret Sutherland's career to demonstrate the obstacles women composers face. Sutherland submitted a piece as M. Sutherland which was accepted for publication until the publishers discovered she was a woman and refused to publish it (interview 1.6.98).

To look at a list of works by Hyde is to be confronted with places and landscape images: *Magpies at Sunrise* (1946), *Brownhill Creek in Spring* (1942), *Reflected Reeds* (1956), *Valley of Rocks* (1975), *Water Nymph* (1986), *Evening in Cordoba* (1987), *The Ring of New Bells* (1959). In her letter replying to my own, Hyde answered the specific 'landscape' questions I asked with detailed descriptions. In the later interview she spoke of the importance of place in her music, reminiscing about paintings which had sparked musical evocations as well as about places significant to her lived experience. Places associated with painful or joyful memories of personal events were often expressed through musical signification.<sup>47</sup>

## figuring nature

Hyde conjectured that 'nature has been a great source of inspiration',

*a source, as [have] the intimate details of our own Australian scene; yet I doubt whether much of my writing could be said to be 'Australian' in evocation. The details have always attracted my attention, flowers, trees, and particularly the phases of Water, and Birds, for, as I always maintain, they, like music, are capable of music and sound; not so much perhaps flowers, [which I use] because of their incredible diversity of form and colour: they are static (except when the wind motivates them) (personal communication 4. 5. 98).*

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<sup>47</sup>*Evening in Cordoba* (1987): 'The composer was inspired by an evening spent in Cordoba, Spain, where the streets resounded to the sound of guitar playing, dancers clapping rhythms and the festivities of the nightly promenade'. Hyde's *Sonata in G minor* (1941-42) was composed while her husband was on active service and then in a prisoner-of-war camp. Generated by the displacement of war, it expresses a 'love theme', the loneliness of separation and then exuberance at 'allied victory and reunion' (from notes by Ann Carr-Boyd *Miriam Hyde: Brownhill Creek in Spring*, SCCD 1027 1993). Hyde says of this Sonata that there are 'only a few bars where I do have an "image" but that it is mostly an "emotional work" for which the significance only became apparent and meaningful after completion' (personal communication 4.5.98; interview 1.6.98).

She adds however that it is very hard to 'analyse the process' of landscape in her work because 'it is such an instinctive thing' and 'depends on the sort of nature we are looking at' and particularly whether it 'contains movement, as for example in the differing moods of trees and the sea'. This sense of movement and detailed observation as the source of musical impulse responding to a sense of place is created mostly through Hyde's attraction to water and its 'phases'. 'I always loved writing about water', she told me enthusiastically.<sup>48</sup>

## water

In mythology, the elements of water and earth have been associated with the female body (or we could say that 'water has been *feminized*') while the elements of air and fire have attracted masculine connotations.<sup>49</sup> Roslynn Haynes says this about water as a recurring signifier:

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<sup>48</sup>Other women composers in Australia are also inspired by water. For example, Ann Ghandar, in her *Four Songs for Piano* has signified 'the effect of water on the land after a long drought. Certain effects of light, mist, shadows, seem to change water surfaces in a very beautiful way' (personal communication 4.5.98); and Esther Rofe who leased an island from the Tasmanian Government and wrote pieces such as *Sea Legend*, a ballet, 'which depicts the varying moods of the sea' (Pauline Petrus quoting Verdon Williams in *Sounds Australian* Autumn 1994: 20).

<sup>49</sup>Water: 'An ancient and universal symbol of purity, fertility and the source of life itself. In all the major cosmologies, life arose from the primordial waters, a female symbol of formless potentiality. In a general sense, water is an emblem of all fluidity in the material world and of the principles of circulation (blood, sap, semen) dissolution, mingling, cohesion, birth and regeneration...The purest waters - especially dew and spring water, but also rain - were thought to have numinous and curative properties as forms of divine grace, gifts of Mother Earth or sky gods (rain or dew)...Water became a metaphor for spiritual nourishment (eg Gospel of St John 4: 14)...Water is also equated with wisdom as in the Taoist image of water finding its way around obstacles, the triumph of seeming weakness over strength. In psychology it represents the energy of the unconscious and its mysterious depths and perils. By contrast, the transparency of still water symbolises contemplative perception' (see Tressider 1997: 222).

*Almost by definition, the desert mocked the interlocking iconography of European landscape art, where water was a visual focus loaded with semiotic significance. Apart from its obvious Christian symbolism, water, by its variety, suggested also changing moods and emotions, from tranquillity to tempest. Rivers gracefully leading the eye into the pictured expanse suggested movement and progress; cataracts crashing to the valley floor demonstrated the Sublime power of Nature; placid lakes mirrored the sky, suggesting the unity of earthly and heavenly blessing, and an eternal natural cycle (1999: 89).*

This intention to represent the moods of water, both in movement and in contrasting contemplative stillness, does not I believe come from an intention to produce a 'female' iconography in Hyde's music - though it may be influenced by post-Enlightenment traditions of feminized representation and mythologies - but rather an affinity within the experience of water-in-place and what it represents emotionally and phenomenologically. When asked if she composed from an awareness of feminine musical gestures, she responded that she had no conscious sense of a feminine idiom in her music - 'it's difficult to hear the difference', she said - but I would suggest that the wealth of lived experience (to which emplacement is central) that she brings to her music *as a woman* is central to her creativity (interview 1.6.98). Hyde's oeuvre of water and detail-in-nature, in phenomenological terms, is relational and experiential rather than an expression of a universal or essentialist motif or archetype, although there may be resonances to those symbologies that assist a deepening of the sense of emplacement.

In the painting that inspired *Brownhill Creek in Spring* for example, Hyde observes that there are 'colours and shapes but not sounds', and so her composition is a 'moving image' that opens with trickling,



(a melody in the left hand), sometimes gushing, sometimes still, but shifting in mood. In the middle section, there is a contrasting texture to represent the 'purple coming over the hills' ('Salvation Jane'). This shift is created by a change from A major to Db major - because sharps, she observes, 'give cool colours of the spectrum, while flats suggest darker reds, purple and so on' - and less movement, but then the stream returns in the original key, with its running arpeggios and fast semiquaver passages (personal communication 4.5.98). Hyde uses the elements of Classical composition (diatonic key structures - what John Cage calls 'legal' harmonies - rhythmic devices and form) to create a detailed acoustic texture to evoke the landscape painting. By doing this she extends the 'landscape' into a more participatory experience for herself and the audience. Though both the painting and soundscape represent space, the latter brings temporality to the representations so that it resonates more deeply with a direct experience of the place it signifies.

Considering this theme of emplacement through water in other works by Hyde emphasises that it has always been direct participation with place that has generated these compositions, even if it is a visual representation, like a painting, that stimulates a purposeful creative response. In *River Idyll* (1975), the lilting left hand gestures and simple diatonic melody in the right that she deploys suggest images and sounds of water dripping from the oars while rowing on a river close to Hyde's home. The sonic landscape represents self within a land-scape by way of an *experience* of the river shared with others close to her rather than by a view of that place, culminating in a *re-experiencing* through creativity.

*Breakers* (1932) written while Hyde was at Port Elliot in South Australia where she was 'watching waves toppling over followed by a spray of foam', expresses the dynamic exchange between the phenomenon of surf and sensory participation. Hyde suggests that the musical elements of the key (Bb minor: 'difficult' and sombre), the extended duration and the 'racing about the keyboard' all transmute the elemental experience of being there through the imaginal lens of the present through which the past is re-experienced acoustically. (The metaphor of the lens though is a globe that refracts while bracketing experience rather than a viewfinder that constructs, in panoptical terms, a land/sea-scape).

In *The Fountain* (1928) by contrast, her experience of place led to a representation of water as 'capricious and sparkling'. Here she uses delicate chromatic arpeggios to capture the sound and picture of the fountain at the top of Martin Place in Sydney, where columns of water create contrasting textures and the fountain itself is experienced as a place of withdrawal from the hubbub of city traffic. Where *Breakers* uses the lower register with energetic rhythms to recreate the experience of surf's thunderous roar, Hyde uses similar rhythmic motifs (fast semi-quavers) to evoke flowing water in *The Fountain* but at a higher pitch so that it is 'more transparent [and has] fewer overtones'.<sup>50</sup>

This use of dynamic movement in contrasting tempi to signify a relational encounter with water-in-place is absent from compositions where nature is apprehended as static, vast and dry (eg *Valley of*

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<sup>50</sup>By 'transparent' here I do not think that Hyde is suggesting a 'realistic' representation (in opposition to 'opaque' in critical terms) but rather an auditory experience that is more kaleidoscopic (interview 1.6.98).

*Rocks*). As Haynes suggests, 'the desert [as a representation] mocked the interlocking iconography of European landscape art, where water was a visual focus loaded with semiotic significance' (1999: 89), and whether it is for want of direct experience with those places (she admits to having limited experience of the outback, except on examining visits), or because of her European heritage and musical education, or because she has imbibed a trend by composers to represent aridity and vast space through fewer gestures, Hyde's 'desert' compositions render their subjects as much through the gaps between the sounds as through the sounds themselves.<sup>51</sup> Because she feels that it is difficult to depict flowers, rocks and vastness musically - no overt movement or sound - she uses a slow tempo, a minor key ('major suggests all is well') and low dynamic levels to 'arouse the bleakness'. *Valley of Rocks* was, she recalls, 'improvised [on] sounds from the landscape' (interview 1.6.98). There is a low bass and slow murmuring quavers to signify looking down from ridge cliffs to a calm sea below. The sound fades in the last bars before returning to the murmuring gestures and to conclude, one note at a time is released from the top down - to 'niente' (nothing), stillness: 'a storehouse of ideas' (1.6.98).

In *Magpies at Sunrise* Hyde uses a six note motif and cadenzas as 'warbles' and whip bird sounds to contrast with the slow, melancholy spaciousness of the parts that evoke 'long lonely landscapes from vantage points [as in the] Blue Mountains' (personal communication 4.5.98).

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<sup>51</sup>This sparseness and melancholy contrasts to Bandt's representation of vastness and dryness (in *Mungo*) which, as I show in the section to follow, is rendered through continuous sound with interpellations.

## vast and dry space

In phenomenological terms, it could be said that Hyde's experience of vastness was framed rather than lived; vastness was experienced as territory to pass through or as a vista below a panoptical platform. The land was experienced but via a reduced sensory and temporal apprehension. Magpie and whipbird sounds, as figurations of the familiar, puncture the unknown and transitory 'picture', a very different corporeality to the one expressed by a composer who has lived in an arid environment (as Anne Boyd has for example) in which the listener becomes attentive to the diversity (and dynamic 'silence') of the sound world and 'ground' of tactile experience. I do not wish to devalue Hyde's experience of vastness and aridity (where a single bird call may have held comforting meaning during her transition from a city sound-world), but to make the point that deep participation with the non-human world and emplacement over time leads to more enriched and associative creative responses through embodiment. For Boyd, the 'landscape' of her childhood environment – the 'outback' - has become the over-arching musical metaphor in her body of work whereas for Hyde the outback is a passing experiential image that generates musical ideas.

## signature poems

But Hyde also says that to heighten the imagery of some works she has set her own words to music. She has written over five hundred poems and while she also sets the poems of other poets to music, finds that using her own poems is less complicated from a copyright

point of view. Titles of these works, such as *Sunrise by the Sea* (song 1954) and *Tone Poems of the Sea* (song cycle 1995) are clearly expressions of her love of water, the sea in particular, and, as the *Tone Poems* particularly show, the words emphasise the contrasting images and moods of the sea that the music evokes and so strengthen the expression of lived experience of place:

*Whipping the waves,  
Lifting the sand, a chill wind scatters the foam.  
Rustling the soft sandhill grass,  
Spinning the roly pollies,  
The sea, the wind are frolicsome.  
(‘A Chill Wind Scatters the Foam’ 1995)*

And by contrast in the same song cycle:

*The sun has travelled his daytime arc;  
His span from east to west,  
An eternal unbroken cycle;  
No point of beginning, no breaking end,  
No change in the tempo of light.  
But here where I saw the day break,  
and heard the quiet lap of waves,  
The clouds are colouring golden and red,  
For the sun his course has run.  
(‘Sunset’ 1995)*

## improvisatory gesturing

If Hyde incorporates words to strengthen musical imagery and to create an intertextual space, what import can improvisation have as an impulse in her work? I was surprised initially that Miriam answered my questions on improvisation so enthusiastically, considering she had been so schooled in the traditions of diatonic tonality and ‘Sonata

Form'.<sup>52</sup> *Humoresque* for example, she told me, was improvised entirely at the keyboard and broadcast before it was written down. It 'existed in [her] mind' until she wrote it down so it could be used in recital by another pianist. She 'won't guarantee to play a piece exactly the same way twice', asserting an underlying improvisatory approach to all her pieces (personal communication 4.5.98; interview 1.5.98).

Not only is Hyde capable of and inclined to improvise difficult works at the piano, but her memory, as an immense propensity for immediate recall and clarity, acts as a clue to the depths musical language signifies for her. To be able to recall an improvised piece enough to notate it later is a huge test of memorisation, association and embodiment. As Bourdieu puts it, 'the *habitus* - embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active present of the whole past of which it is a product' (1990: 56).

Hyde's freshness suggests a deep knowledge of elements and places implicit in her pieces, and embodiment of the playfulness of the

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<sup>52</sup>I use 'Sonata Form' here as a metaphor for the Classical tradition, even though as a term in traditional Analysis it refers to the standardised development of the structure of the first movement of a symphony, concerto or sonata (following the model of C.P.E. Bach, 1714-1788). As Scholes suggests, this term is unsatisfactory because many composers deviate from its developmental design within their first movements and because it gives the impression that the form 'is that of the whole sonata' (see Scholes 1977: 963). The term is a good example of how the diversity of musical creativity has been reduced to a containment of gestures far removed from the reality of its production but also, as McClary observes, of how musical terms have been genderized: 'Sonata Form' while not having been labelled with 'masculine' and 'feminine' referents until the mid-nineteenth century - masculine, the strong opening, allegro (= quick) theme, feminine, the 'second subject' - has in much earlier pieces still been full of gendered marking. 'The heavily gendered legacy of these paradigms cannot be ignored' (see McClary, 1991: 14). Hyde for example has used and subverted Sonata Form in multiple ways, as in her *Sonata in G minor* (1941-42) where she 'recycles' the second subject ('feminine' theme, traditionally) of the 'Sonata Form' first movement as a unifying element in all the movements. It is repeated in many tonal, rhythmic and dynamic configurations and operates, I believe, both as a ground for improvisation and, as the CD notes suggest, as a signifier for personal story and feelings.

composing intention from the past within the present, especially when water is present. Her identification with experience through creativity leaves indelible marks on the pieces, on their re-telling and on her continuing lived experience in the 'immediate present'. In my own musical experience memorisation is a clear signal to the self-construct of a deeper and more embodied identification with the piece and represents a desire to enliven the moment of experiencing it through improvisatory intention rather than through emulation of a composer's elusive intentions. This morphological memory is enriched and sharpened by a focused awareness of the place in which that moment was lived.

During the interview, to demonstrate a point she was making, Hyde offered to play a part of one of her piano concertos. Hearing her play, I was affected by the freedom, technical facility and joy she conveyed, as well as by her capacity for memorisation.<sup>53</sup> It confirmed my belief, that the joy in music stems from improvisatory gestures and self-in-place at the moment of sound-making, even when revisiting a formalist construction. To suggest that structured composition harbours improvisatory gestures is treading a fine line but Hyde's own performances - in which the joy of the moment given on the piano so embodies and voices her expressive self - extend the improvisatory gesture into perpetuity through bringing past experiences (embodied history of being-in-place) into the present. Her music is always-becoming, slipping into the space between the confining binaries of a logocentric world so that fixed signs represent

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<sup>53</sup>As I work as a music therapist with dementia sufferers - people with little or no memory - who retain in their bodies some recollection of musical associations, I was struck by this contrast. Hyde's language is music and at 86 years-of-age continues to be her way of being-in-the-world: her *habitus*.

something much more experiential and open than they appear on the page. As Hyde remarks on her composing impulses:

*Much of my own composing has been an act of improvisation...I have even broadcast a quite lengthy work of which not a note was written down, but just memorised, as it developed, at the piano (firstly in my mind of course). I remember one of the professors at the RCM being quite 'struck' by this apparently unusual happening. Only when someone else expressed a wish to learn and perform 'it', did I undertake the laborious task of putting it on paper.<sup>54</sup>*

To rephrase Yehudi Menuhin here, all music should be played as if it is being improvised or it is no longer music. If all sound, refrain, is a chrysalis that is music-becoming, then to play 'as if improvising' is a way into deeper knowing, experiencing, interrelatedness and non-closure.

To return to one piece here as an example of Hyde's improvising gestures which are evident not only in her performances but also in the scores and recordings of her playing.<sup>55</sup> *Brown Hill Creek in Spring* carries this epigraph:

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<sup>54</sup>Hyde commented in her letter that the score for this piece 'looked different' to pieces that were composed note for note (personal communication 4.5.98).

<sup>55</sup>It needs to be said too, that although Hyde was educated in the 'Classical' traditions of composition which 'purified' large forms like opera, concerti and sonatas, most of her work has been in smaller genres for performance in domestic spaces and for music education. As musicologist Marcia Citron points out, women have only been writing in large forms 'for public places' (as they gained access to these domains) in the twentieth century and performance of large genres have been favoured over smaller ones (quoted in Carol Neuls-Bates (ed) 1996: 369). Women's compositions have often gone unnoticed for this and many other reasons, even though their repertoire is vast and diverse. Miriam Hyde, Anne Boyd and Moya Henderson have each written many small works but also gained mainstream acceptance through the 'initiation rites' of writing large scale or significant works to be performed at grand occasions. At the *Sydney Spring Festival*, September 1998, Boyd's 80 minute commissioned cantata *Dreams for the Earth* was performed and in review compared to a Mahler symphony (quoted by Bob Maynard on ABC FM following the broadcast of the work). Henderson's commissioned piece *Sacred Site*, written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Sydney Opera House, in 1983, led to her 'composer-in-residence' status with the Australian Opera (see biographical notes held at the AMC library).



*Inspired by a water-colour "Green Hills" by Adelaide artist Esmond George, who lived near the Hyde family in Torres Park. The painting, property of the composer, captured the graceful contours of the Adelaide foothills. What it could not convey was the sound of the creek, and bird calls. The middle section, in C# major, suggests the intimacy of the walks, in springtime, when patches of the purple weed (known in S. A. as "Salvation Jane") add a new colour to the scene.*

*This was written in Adelaide during the war years (Oct. '42) and recorded by Giesecking for the ABC, in 1952. At the date of this revised copy, Oct. '84, it remains unpublished (score held at the AMC).*

In traditional Analysis, this piece could be described as ternary in form. Structured in three parts, the final section is a repeat of the first with an added coda (cadential phrase) and the second section presents strongly contrasting material. While this description is informative from a musicological point of view, it is too reductive to elucidate a work which is clearly full of sonic metaphors of movement and sound in response to the stasis of a landscape representation in paint.

Towards the end of *Brownhill*, a bridging section is marked 'quasi cadenza', with the directive for it to be played 'clear, delicate, watery'.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled 'Brownhill Creek in Spring'. The score is written on ten staves, with the first two staves of each system in treble clef and the remaining staves in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Handwritten annotations in italics provide performance instructions. The score is divided into several sections by bracketed measures.

Key annotations and markings include:

- espress* (first staff)
- quasi cadenza* (first staff, measures 5-6)
- poco rall* (first staff, measure 5)
- mp (clear, delicate, watery)* (first staff, measure 6)
- cantabile* (second staff, measure 1)
- più sost e rit* (second staff, measure 1)
- cantabile, dolce* (third staff, measure 1)
- Lento* (fourth staff, measure 1)
- Tranquillo, andante* (fifth staff, measure 1)
- perden - do - si* (seventh staff, measure 1)
- mp subito (birdcall)* (seventh staff, measure 1)

The score is printed on OSSUM MUSIC PAPER No. 1 (De Luxe) with the number 8 2468 in the bottom right corner.

(score of 'BrownHill Creek in Spring' courtesy of AMC)

A cadenza mark in the 'Sonata Form' traditions of concerto writing is a signal to the player to improvise on material from the movement just played as a coda or 'afterthought' to the movement. In Hyde's piece, the cadenza mark relates to her own freedom of expression within the moment: she is, I believe, attempting to validate this moment for others through writing it in, asking that the player responds to this impulse by playing it with freedom and spontaneity, resonating, with the freedom that the *Creek* and *Spring* represent. My sense of her intention is that she would endorse a player's wish to swerve into their own improvisation if the moment invited them to do so because her own composing impulses are so improvisatory, so 'lived'.

### composing sacred place

My questions at the close of the interview touched on the sacred, as I was keen to discover whether a composer for whom being-in-the-world was synonymous with composing was also motivated by a meaning system of some kind. 'I was interested in all you told me about yourself' she had written in her letter, 'because as women we respond intuitively and spiritually to the images' (personal communication 4.5.98). Hyde expressed a deep sense of the sacred but, resisting closure, said that she had 'no sense of God as male or female but as a presence, a God [from whose] rationale emerges symmetry and design - wholeness and design in life'. She suggested that her respect for the non-human world was an expression of a belief in a 'creator' or 'cosmic God' and this sense had inspired many poems and musical compositions. She uses a male God-metaphor at

times, she said, 'for convenience'. The creative imagination (the muse), she suggested, 'comes in so many different ways, [and] 'compellingly'. 'If I don't have this urge I don't embark on writing something', and it is this urge, or intuitive being, generated so often by a sense of place, that is the improvising impulse, the pulse that keeps the moment of being open and connected to the world as we live it (interview 1.6.98).

Through her affinity with water, her love of nature and sense of place and through an embodiment of musical intention expressed in improvisatory gestures and memorisation, Hyde's body of work, though 'traditional' and 'conservative' in many respects, is diverse and expressive of lived experience and a sacrality that is not reduced by fixed meaning systems. That the signs are 'feminine' is arguable but for this remarkable woman, writing 'herself-in-place' constitutes one voice in a chorus of resonating voices that is interrelated at many levels and never closed to understanding.

## **Ros Bandt**

My letter to Ros Bandt called forth a quick and enthusiastic response resulting in an interview being arranged at her home at the suggested time. Like Hyde, Bandt has lived in the one suburban place for a long time and so outside and inside space reflect her passion for her art.

Her backyard resonated with chimes, aeolian harps and tumbling water, the garage had been converted to acoustic engineering and the house itself harboured CDs, computers, scores and a diverse range of works-in-progress. Even the station wagon parked in the backyard was stacked with inventions ready for a visit to a school.

Bandt and Hyde's body of works appear at first hearing so different from each other that there seems little point in drawing comparisons. However, both artists express a strong sense of identification with place, particularly with water and/or its absence. From my interviews I discovered another common characteristic: the joy of participation with the creative process and a singlemindedness of purpose which could be interpreted as embodied imagination.

Just as Hyde's lived experience is inseparable from her artistic impulses so too is it for Bandt. Her generous and compassionate spirit, enthusiasm, eclecticism and determination to educate others in broader, three-dimensional listening, social and environmental responsibility and awareness ensure that she is committed to nourishing community cooperation. Many of her projects have been collaborations with councils, schools, museums and communities and reflect a sharing of energy and ideas.

## eclectic

As a composer with a string of international awards and broadcasts to her credit and an oeuvre that broaches a diversity of genres, the signifier 'composer' has many 'deferred' meanings when considering the diversity and range of the works and the extent to which Bandt as an artist embodies congruence through their expression. She prefers to call herself a 'sound artist', and has been referred to as a 'sound architect' and an 'acoustic designer' but none of these descriptions adequately address the eclecticism implicit in her body of work. As well as performing and recording on instruments and sculptures which are 'inventions' as much as replicas of objects from the natural world, she performs on 'traditional' and 'early' instruments such as flutes, recorders, psaltery and percussion with the early music group *La Romanesca* and the cross-cultural group *Back to Back Zithers*. Bandt's own biographical notes sum up her compositional oeuvre: 'her compositions reflect different integrations of acoustic, live electronic and studio manipulations' (biographical notes accompanying CD order form: courtesy of the composer).

But does this eclecticism have any relevance to a feminist aesthetic in phenomenological terms? Bandt's eclectic approach to composition represents, I believe, an openness to meaning so that it not only projects a diversity of intention from within Bandt's body of work but speaks for the diversity-in-difference within the lived experience of women artists.

Feminist questions which addressed the difficulties faced by women composers were met by Bandt with a mild rebuttal. Being a woman

had not made any difference to her career as a composer, she asserted, and she was not interested in the 'gender debate', as she considered herself to be one of the 'rare species of female in the male world' of acoustic innovation. Yet there seemed to be some contradictions between these statements and her lived experience, suggesting that even if her own career had taken a smooth course she was aware that others may not have found it so. She held a position on the advisory committee for the first all-Australian Composing Women's Festival,<sup>56</sup> and her biographical notes on a CD order form twice refer to her gender<sup>57</sup> in ways which carry import. As I suggested in my overview of women composers, success can screen the issue of male dominance from women composers, particularly if the composer is leading her field as Bandt appears to be. By breaking away from the ranks of institutionalised form she has made headlines by exploring the untapped dimension of interactive soundscapes before it was fashionable to do so.

Bandt would not have had the success and recognition she has had if she had not been highly competitive in interactive technologies (as good as and better than her male contemporaries) and ground-

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<sup>56</sup>This festival (held in Melbourne in 1994) was the second *Composing Women's Festival* in Australia (the first was held in Adelaide in 1991) and, at Thérèse Radic's instigation, was devoted to music by Australian women composers. Radic says: 'Women composers, even more than men, urgently require performance in order to confirm and to retain their newly acquired but still tenuous position and to build at will. Reputation is built that way. And income derives from reputation. It was for these reasons - the confirmation of position and the need to build - that I took the idea of a Melbourne all-Australian festival and a conference that used the festival as a resource, to Arts Victoria' (in Macarthur & Poynton (eds) 1999: 11).

<sup>57</sup>'Ros Bandt is an Australian woman composer who has pioneered new forms of sonic expression from her base in Melbourne, Australia, and abroad. She was the first woman to be awarded the Don Banks Composers award in 1990, and has won many international awards for installation, radio art and composition' (blurb for *Move Records*, courtesy of the composer, 1998). Another biographical note from the AMC file is not gender specific: 'Ros Bandt is an internationally recognised Australian composer and sound artist. She has pioneered spatial music, sound sculpture and audience interactive sound installation through her original works and writings'.

breaking in her ideas.<sup>58</sup> These two qualities have made her 'visible'. However, the new ideas are not just a reflection of the explosive field of technological change but also expressive of the eclectic experience of being-a-woman in the world. Even if Bandt's 'rise' may not be, to her, a gender question, her creative impulses come from a sense of being-a-woman in the world. While asserting her unique status amongst male colleagues in the interview, Bandt frequently referred to her lived experience and beliefs as a woman-artist, particularly when attempting a generic description of her work: 'I do have an amazingly spiritual background...that I put into my art. [I am interested in] chaos theory [and the sense that] everything affects everything else...women are better at plurality...' (interview 5.6.98).

An example of her struggle against and ability to rise above male dominated technologies is implicit in the comment she makes about her CD *Stargazer*, which was recorded in the concrete cylinder of the Collins Place car park in Melbourne, five floors underground. The disc took seven years to complete and was interrupted by the advent of digital recording and the intrusion of a male sound engineer. She says this about the experience:

*Prior to this I had usually carried out the recording myself. There is a great range of technological, musical and recording processes on this compact disc. Most post-equalisation and re-recording was omnidirectional to give the disc the flow and continuity that was needed to link the omnidirectional analogue recordings with the digital directional recordings that Martin [the sound engineer] preferred. I have one reservation about digital recording for this type of environmental music - I find it too cool. To me the superclean image of a thumping, resonant sound field*

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<sup>58</sup>Bandt draws on a rich background. She grew up in a household where invention and music were integrated and encouraged (her father, an auto designer, invented the 'ute' or 'pick-up' truck, and her mother was a music teacher) (see CD notes to *Austral Voices* San Francisco: New Albion Records 1990).



*seems somehow to flatten the image in a too-glitzzy way (1990: 8).*

While deploying technological wizardry - 'radiance' - Bandt shares this mode of production with an abundance of resources from her experience as a woman in the 'real' world and from her 'plurality' as a spatio-temporal being. She confidently resists or appropriates interjections by her male associates where appropriate to do so. But the gender issue is still relevant. Through asserting her own experience of the world and her eclectic intentions - against the assumptions of expectations for 'commercial' sound - her recordings become a palimpsest from the experiences of interacting with the world on whatever she has at hand, prepared or invented from 'found objects' or on 'radiant' equipment. The final, and often temporary, artefact represents a process, the becoming-sound of emplacement that never closes to possibilities of production, meaning and experience. This ever-becoming intertextuality then is a political issue as well as an expression of feminal desire and embodiment.

## political intent

Although water figures prominently in Bandt's oeuvre, the wider questions of emplacement, site and Indigenous loss of language of place have become thematic concerns. It is these issues that I believe resonate with what could be called the feminine, expressed most overtly through her eclecticism - influenced by Buddhism and spirituality, a thirst for knowledge and women's 'plurality' - and by collaboration. She says this in her 'Credo' in 1990:

*Sound art crosses the boundaries of time and space, the eye and the ear, and physical and psychological reality. As a composer, musician, performance artist, sculptor, mother and white Australian female, sound art provides me with a limitless set of options with which to perceive the world and contribute to it. The intentional choice to use technology has a recessive place in this holistic world view as an artist, but as our environment becomes more heavily biased in its use of technology, it is the role of the artist to deal with it creatively and responsibly (1990: 1).*

By bringing together, breaking apart and recreating our world of artefacts, Bandt speaks for women and their lived experience, even though she does not critique her work in feminist terms or overtly express feminist concerns in her oeuvre. That men and children may also be sustained by the power of her work indicates the diversity, depth and potential for interrelatedness of that intention. Her work is accessible to anyone with a curiosity towards sound-making. The wide scope of her work is postmodern: its fragmented content deconstructs any authorial voice. The readers (listeners/participants) are invited to interpret these multiple selves from their own fragmented subjectivities.

When I spoke to her in June 1998, Bandt talked of a recent piece, *Thrausmata (Ancient Greek Fragments 1997)*, in which '[s]even Fragments of ancient Greek literature come to life in a new form and can be heard again as if looking backwards through the lens of a telescope through time'. While as a temporal exercise the piece recreates past texts to prevent them 'becoming audible ghosts', it is 'site specific' so that the words are recorded within the locations of their dialectic origins and has all the elements of an intertext rather than an object that her use of the term 'lens' here could connote. The artefact presents '[t]he influence of culture, geography and time [as]

everpresent filters on the sounds themselves and on our perceptions of them'. This work has a special dedication that brings it within a postcolonial critique as it is 'dedicated to all lost and endangered languages, as Ancient Greek and many Aboriginal languages have become at the end of the second millennium' (notes accompanying the piece: courtesy of the composer). Its intertextuality and emphasis on re-creation through deconstruction and becoming mark it as postmodern.

### *mungo*

To come now to representation of Australian space rendered through Bandt's intertextuality. *Mungo* was originally part of a larger multi-media, collaborative and interactive piece<sup>59</sup> for performance called *Fair Exchanges: Hear the Dance, See the Music*, in which dancers interacted with and activated computer driven sound sources. As an intertext it melds all experiential data with an historiographic underpinning generated by the place itself. It combines sounds from the land-as-text (wind through the strings of an aeolian harp and bird sounds) with layers of sounds that voice the site as significant in the experience of its dwellers over time: didjeridu, stories told by an Aboriginal elder and sounds of shells.

The idea for *Mungo* grew from visits to Lake Mungo in southern New South Wales - 'a dry salt lake which has the oldest geological and

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<sup>59</sup>Even the term 'multi-media' does Bandt's work a disservice. While her body of work uses multi-media techniques, it incorporates multiple and diverse generic elements in it.

demographic history on this continent to date' (Bandt 1990: 15).

Bandt speaks of the place with reverence and fascination:

*The ground was littered with 20,000-year-old fossils, and each time I ventured to walk over the site I was profoundly affected by the ancient history which appeared to be crushed beneath my feet. The eye is drawn towards erosion lines which unite pre and post ice-age geological formations. The cones, plateaus and receptive friezes seemed to have no relationship to each other. Its beauty is indescribable, but the impact of entering it as a modern-day white woman is overpowering. I felt irrelevant, almost as if I was imposing on the landscape. The land commands a respect greater than I have experienced in any other place (1990: 15).*

The resonance between Bandt's self-construct and the experience of this place provides a ground for the imagination and for an emerging awareness of all that the place signifies in the collective Australian memory, both Aboriginal and white. Describing the compositional process, she writes:

*It seemed appropriate that the sounds be directly connected to the physical environment - the earth's crust and the volatile wind paths which help to shape it. Several days were spent in my studio selecting the sounds and instruments. Finally I settled on two of my handmade wind chimes, one of natural and ceramic shells which I had workshopped with children at Lake Mungo, and another from hollow bamboos brushed by thin slate and sandstone. A plastic container of quandong nuts collected at Redcliffs and an aluminium bowl filled with dry snail shells added to the dry, fossilised sound timbres I was looking for. These became the earth sounds which I positioned physically within the floor space for the dancers to play with[...]*

*It was an interesting mix to interface the oldest landscape and rituals with the newest state-of-the-art technological production (1990: 18).*

*Mungo* resonates acoustically with the place it represents. In the production for radio, the harp sounds were recorded within the dry

bed of Lake Mungo itself but in both the earlier performance piece and in the later site-specific piece, the 'overpowering' experience of being at the place drives both the composer and receiver to a deep sense of respect and attunement as well as to a plenitude of possible interpretations.

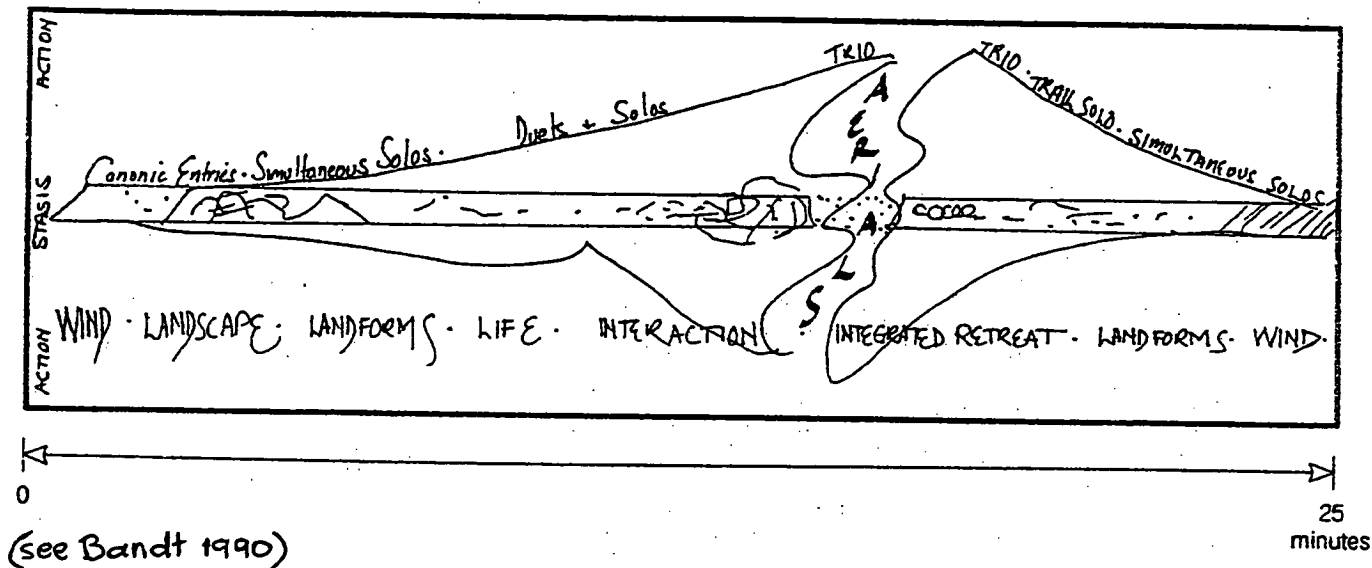
The piece is clearly also a political statement about the loss of belonging to place for Indigenous nations. The distorted voice of local Aboriginal elder Alice Kelly tells a story just beyond hearing ('blurred') while didjeridu sounds are interpellated through the narrative and then disappear.<sup>60</sup> Against the discontinuous voice and didjeridu are heard the wind in the aeolian harp, bird calls, jaws harp and the rattling of sculptured and found shells, suggesting timelessness. But a close listening reveals a constantly shifting sound world within this stasis. This subtlety of movement is a trademark of Bandt's work which constructs a field for multiple readings as well as an expression of diversity.<sup>61</sup> As this 'organic' representation of the form of the piece shows, there is plenty of scope for interpretation:

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<sup>60</sup>In my interview with her, Bandt reflected that she prefers not to think of her pieces in narrative terms as they are generally designed for three-dimensional effect. However, as sounds proceed in time as well as space, I use 'narrative' as a temporal marker, not to diminish their spatial representations nor the depth of their associative possibilities.

<sup>61</sup>Bandt's piece *Loops* (1983) for solo reorder, recorders, voice and 8 channel computer tape, is a good example of this subtlety. A musicological description would position it within a minimalist context, as the small movements in rhythmic structure and pitch are cushioned by an overall sense of resistance to movement. The effect is an ambience saturated with possibilities. Bandt says of the process of making *Loops* that 'I had built myself a self-propelled line mixing machine where I could play, line and mix at the same time' (see Bandt 1990: 13).

Morphology of continuity for Mungo



The relationship with the land and its stories reverberates through *Mungo* because Bandt spent time 'on location' with the local Aboriginal people while recording the sounds of that place for the later piece. She was deeply affected by her experience of the place and the piece expresses her sensibilities as well as Indigenous resonances and a political 'message'. As an acoustic palimpsest it could be interpreted as having a healing function, in a space that has been damaged by intrusion and disrespect, by honouring the 'deep time' of the space and the voices of the Indigenous owners of that place.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> As Kate Rigby points out: 'The concept of "wounded" or "ruptured" space was developed by Emil Fackenheim (1982) with respect to the experience of the Holocaust, and is used by Deborah Bird Rose (1996) to image the Australian colonial context' (quoted in Michael Griffith & James Tulip (eds) 1999: 337).

## putting improvising in place

How then does this composition draw on improvisatory gestures in composition and performance that might suggest a response to participating with the land in the moment of experiencing it? Shona Innes, one of the dancers, offered this comment on her experience of performing *Mungo* in its earlier format:

*The sound of the harp was the most inspirational part of the sound environment for me and ironically it was the one musical element which was completely independent of the 3 DIS.<sup>63</sup> The harp sound made sense of the whole piece - its dynamic ethereal presence was indispensable considering the static nature of 3 DIS generally. Even so the quandongs, snails, shells and bamboo were great to enter and play and I found an improvisational approach to each of them was the most fruitful in terms of musical as well as physical output (personal communication quoted in Bandt 1990: 20).*

At a performance and interactive level, the piece stimulates spontaneous interaction with its elements. Clearly for this performer, the sounds of the aeolian harp generated significant biokinetic experiences not only because they had a relationship to the space in which she was performing but because they carried with them the space (and its stories-in-time) they signified: the windswept bowl of Lake Mungo and its lost tribes. My own experience of first hearing *Mungo* on radio was overwhelming in intensity. The sounds resonated for many days afterwards and when I came to compose my piece *Sonic Arc* as a soundscape for a travelogue exhibition that included

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<sup>63</sup>The DIS system 'uses four cameras which simultaneously view a defined artistic space. It is possible to assign up to ninety-nine subspaces in any square or oblong form within this area through the computer software program to which the cameras are interfaced. Sound can be composed and directed to be played in any of the assigned areas. When a body passes through one of these defined areas, called gangs, the sound is triggered due to the change in light level. The overall effect is that the dancers can engage the sound whenever they want, and for how long they want, providing they know where the gangs are and how they want to "play it" or "with it" (Bandt 1990: 14).

Lake Mungo in its references, I hinted at Bandt's piece in the fading moments by improvising harp-like sounds on piano strings and later adding bird and wind sounds in the studio. The delicate interaction between silence (space for deep listening), 'natural' and engineered sound sources conjures a sonority that is mythopoetic, evoking a sacrality and suggestion of healing of place and space.

The harp sounds which provide the ground for *Mungo* are representative of a continuing experiment in interactive community sound sculptures. These sculptures are often built with school children and other members of the community or artists and then positioned within certain environments so that they both resonate to the acoustic environment and provoke interaction from passers-by. In either mode they have an improvisatory function through their momentarily engagement with place and participant.

When I asked Ros Bandt in the interview how improvisation played into her work she hesitated to describe her installations as improvisatory, even though she deploys that term in her writing and discussion about her body of work.<sup>64</sup> She prefers to describe them in a wider sense, and feels that improvisation is 'a loaded term' that reduces her oeuvre to 'something' when it is 'fundamentally broader and evolving'. She likes to describe it as 'flows' on a 'number of continuums' and says 'I am an improviser too but it's about a large context' (5.6.98).

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<sup>64</sup>For instance, in her notes on *Thrausmata* she says that 'The recreation of ancient instrumental timbres was achieved in many ways, both natural and artificial. In the first Sappho text setting, I have improvised live on medieval psaltery to the spoken word and then lowered the string sound beyond its normal pitch range, while in the second setting I have set up an artificial ancient organ on a sampler by recording a Pythagorean fifth on two ancient wooden pipes in order to simulate a possible ancient organ in the appropriate temperament. The keyboard then allows me to improvise in Pythagorean in parallel organum' (see notes from the composer 1997).



What then might *Mungo* share, through its improvisatory gestures that could resonate with a sense of place as sacred, an attempt at resacralisation of lost richness and diversity of place and culture from a white settler perspective? At the risk of sounding essentialist I want to suggest that the piece could be read as juxtaposing two prevailing mythological metaphors: land as rhizome for the imagination and woman as metonym for land or, to put it in cosmic terms, Gaia, or the Buddhist Mother and the space between signification. The piece's power is in its potential to evoke the land definitively, to construct a narrative where the participant shares a dance with Gaia and with its Indigenous dwellers while also grieving for the loss encumbered through colonisation. But it also opens the representation up to multiple meanings. The experience of listening to the piece can be charged with numinosity. Positioning the harp within the place it represents could be read as a sacralising act, one that affirms the place as pre and post -colonial space.

There is little doubt that this composer's resonance to place, derived from her own *habitus*, is central to her compositional impulse. Each creative act is for Bandt another step in the journey back or forwards in time, as she expresses reverence for life and respect for place as a country in which to dwell. As many of her pieces show, Bandt is not concerned with fixed meanings and formalist parameters but with subtle shifts and interrelated sonorities which open interpretation to the ears of the listener. By playing with a diverse collection of elements, from the most primitive to the most technologically refined, she improvises in the becoming world of sound while voicing her own desires, sense of place, ecological awareness and political concerns.

## Hazel Smith

At first I felt that Hazel Smith's work was peripheral to my concerns. In her initial response, delayed due to work commitments, she offered to participate in research but suggested her poems were city-based rather than nature-based. I returned to her a new and more specific set of questions<sup>65</sup> which overtly tracked improvisation, emplacement and feminist impulses relevant to her pieces as I understood them and, as an interview was not possible, used her answers to these questions as the basis of my research. It became clear that although nature is not a recurring motif in Smith's compositions, journeys between place and time that voice an autobiographical, fragmented and self-evolving female subject are pivotal and so pertinent to this sounding.

In the depth of diversity that women artists embody, Hazel Smith's oeuvre represents a commitment to difference and performativity that is rich with references to place in a shifting temporality and subjectivity. Her body of work resonates with Bandt's because it explores the boundaries of texts through a blend of technological elements and motifs from lived experience. It is speech or language-as-action that is central to Smith's work rather than texts as sedimented remnants for acoustic experimentation, both at performance level and for application to the digital disc. On another level however Smith's oeuvre shares with Bandt's an expression of a concern for social justice, and often indirectly, outside space.<sup>66</sup> If

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<sup>65</sup>See appendix B.

<sup>66</sup>Smith has collaborated on several projects with 'environmental' artist Sieglinde Karl. *Secret Places* (with composer Ron Nagorcka and photographer Kate Hamilton), 'a multisensory orchestration of responses to the natural world, was installed at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston [in April 1996]. Hazel Smith's performance text for *Secret*

Smith's body of work shares anything at all with Hyde's it is in its adaptation of formal structural elements from European musical traditions.

## speech acts

What speaks most emphatically through Smith's acoustic art is a sense of the polemic. She is attempting to subvert the process of speech and writing by collaborating with that process so that, as she puts it, she is 'always trying to turn ideas round and show they can be seen in another light and...to push language to its limits and turn it on its head and see if it can survive'.<sup>67</sup> Language, the articulating intention, is, to put it in structuralist terms, the means by which (a new/old) reality is constructed and so by recreating, through deconstructing, Smith makes a becoming-space between the binding and hierarchical binaries of patriarchy. That she engages with her own process of constructing that reality is central to my belief that she configures a space where meaning is deferrable and the self is never one fixed construct.

Although Smith is an accomplished violinist and composes pieces to include on some recordings,<sup>68</sup> she is most interested in generating

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*Places* is a response of a postmodernist consciousness to this [Karl's 'Casuarina Woman - a larger than life-size goddess figure'] reassertion of the mythic. It questions the possibility of a mythic consciousness in modern life...Smith translates the Casuarina Woman into the psychologies of the modern girls Cass, Cathy and Casuarina (or perhaps they are aspects of the one girl)' (see David Mamet in *Island* #67, 1996: 126).

<sup>67</sup>All quotations from Smith are from her written response to the questionnaire sent on March 25, 1999 unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>68</sup>Smith's CD *Poet without Language* (1991) includes several short works in which violin and spoken texts are layered over each other. Excerpt 2 on the accompanying cassette is an example.

new and reconfiguring old structures - something she takes from music, she owns - and in concentrating on rhythmic shifts rather than on pitch experimentation. So her pieces, she says, are 'divided into sections and the tensions between and within the sections are created by variation, repetition and contrast, with several different "motifs" which bind the work together'. This motific element, bones of the work, is largely improvised until it emerges as a textual form. She observes that '[t]he structure often arises as I am writing but I don't generally feel happy with the piece unless it has a strong structure and I often have quite a visual sense of the structure in my head'. What I read here is a close affiliation with the impulse, with the formative associations that build the piece, even if these structural elements later become sedimented constructs for improvised interpellations. It is important to keep in mind that one of the difficulties in assessing an artist's improvised work on recording (as representative of the whole body of work) as I have been for this thesis is that it is perceived as a sedimented construct in time and space when it is only one experience and version of 'improvised interpellations'. Although there are few similarities between Hyde and Smith's pieces, Hyde's words, that she 'never plays them the same way twice', are true to varying degrees to all moments of creativity, and thus to interpret a body of work by any performer through recorded examples is to reduce all elements - composer, text, listener - to closure. This becoming-structure, that is central to 'experience' and so apparent in Smith's compositions, is a close alignment of intention and event, where the un-formed image and the moment of making co-create in production of further co-creations which remain open to meaning. It is what Smith and Dean call in their writing about their collaborations 're(de)constructing' (*Sounds*

*Australian Autumn* 1991: 39). In every aspect of Smith's work there is space for a multiplicity of meanings and a sense that not only is the composer deconstructing (patriarchal) meaning-constructs for herself while recreating others but deliberately pushing the listener to corroborate in this subversive act.

## poststructural intentions

In theoretical terms Smith's work is clearly informed by the discourses of postmodernism, feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, new technologies, 'language' poetry<sup>69</sup> and traditional musical form. As an academic working in an English department of a university, Smith is exposed to evolving discourses that constitute Cultural Studies and so brings these developing ideas to her body of work. She acknowledges the influence of Judith Butler's 'performativity' theory and suggests that her own 'sonic cross-dressing' is a merging of performativity and performance. Derrida too has influenced the self-conscious deconstructive approach in Dean and Smith's collaborations. Smith's lived experience as a published poet, a teacher of literature and theory, a violinist who plays largely through-composed experimental music, and an immigrant (British) woman of Lithuanian-Jewish heritage, are all facets of her 'selves' and of the diversity of her lived experience - the *habitus* - that percolate through her work.

Language-as-action in Smith's creative work is generated by an improvisatory intention as is evident for two reasons. Firstly, the

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<sup>69</sup>By 'language poetry' I mean poetry that deconstructs language in the writing process.

textual basis, while a linguistic construct accompanied by improvised (quasi-musical) acoustic manipulations in the studio by Roger Dean, 'speaks' for a new place, a place of becoming for women through an emerging language. Secondly, as Smith informed me, some of her written text is 'applied' in the studio and performance by way of digital delay as an improvised layer over pre-recorded elements so that 'improvising is a way of dislocating and then rearticulating the material in the whole piece'. The collaborative nature of her work too, both as applied collaboration with her own pre-recorded sounds/texts and with Roger Dean in performance and recording (where Dean improvises on 'radiant' machines over pre-recorded samples) makes for a deeper quality of improvisation. It is the relational nature of the dyadic improvisations that is expressively synchronic, open and conversational in the most intentional sense.<sup>70</sup>

When I inquired whether she was 'playing with the between spaces of being, the movable between gender, space and other, violinist and poet, embodied voice and disembodied voice', she wrote:

*I think the overturning of binary oppositions is central to what I'm doing. I'm always trying to turn ideas round and show that they can be seen in another light and I'm always trying to push language to its limits and turn it on its head and see if it can survive. I'm also very interested in change, in the fluidity of identity, in the idea that nothing is fixed.*

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<sup>70</sup>In responding to the 1999 ABC's *Improvisatory Music Awards*, John Crawford, in presenting the views of the five judges on the seventeen groups who took part in the semi-finals, said that it was clear that the duos rather than trios, quartets and quintets explored a more vibrant, vigorous and interactive space (*New Music Australia* August 2, 1999). As a participant in this award (as a Tasmanian Semi-Finalist) with poet Sue Moss (and in other similar events) I have found one-to-one conversation the ideal medium for exploratory play, particularly in hybrid art forms. That this kind of relational event reconstructs in performance the reciprocity and 'partnership' of intimacy and love is not surprising.

Smith's fascination with linguistics has generated imaginary languages, constructs that allow her, like the novelist Ursula Le Guin,<sup>71</sup> to reconfigure a world without a hierarchy of opposites. This complex linguistic exercise is an overtly feminist one, as it blurs the boundaries between past, present and future such that Smith's *habitus* and the imaginary woman she invents interconnect and mutate in the 'between space' and time. In literary terms the works blur narrative and poetic impulses. In musical and linguistic terms they shift between sound and word to a new language where signification is not closed in the cluttered space of hegemonic relations.

## [w]rites

A definitive example of Smith's multi-modal approach is her paired works, what she calls 'technological music dramas', *Nuraghic Echoes* (1993) and *The Riting the Runda* (1994) (see Smith in *Island* #67, 1996: 135). Both these compositions demonstrate her appropriation of structuralist linguistics for the purposes of decoding signs that ram women into tight essentialist corners. Word-play and a reinvented language emerge, part structure part applied improvisation, together signifying both deconstruction and becoming.

I am indebted to Smith's theoretical descriptions of the process by which she develops her creative productions. Her engagement with the discourses of feminism and semiotics, not to mention music,

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<sup>71</sup>See for example *Always Coming Home* (1986) in which Le Guin constructs not only an imaginary language but a geography and whole way of life.

have simplified the process of research but also meant that to run my own thread of interpretation to some kind of 'new' meaning has seemed superfluous. So I return to lived experience, that sense of being-in-the-world that is central to a phenomenological approach, as a way in to her work.

To decode both these works through the globe of experience is to engage with being-a-woman in the world. It is through juxtaposing the multiple use of rhythmic structures with 'semantic possibilities' that Smith's experience of the hierarchy of binary oppositions is challenged. She says:

*My piece Signed Original Since is a fast-moving mosaic of words involving multiple oppositions between ancient culture and modern civilisation, mind and body, sound and sense. I notated the words in rhythms which moved between regular bar lengths in 3/4 or 4/4 time, and very irregular ones in 3/16, 11/16, 5/8 or 5/4 time. This produced a mixture of rhythmic propulsion and disjuncture which reinforced, and yet also contained, the semantic oppositions and syntactic disruptions in the piece.*

*This rhythmical notation has been used subsequently to notate rhythmic multi-tracking of my voice in radio pieces such as Nuraghic Echoes (in Macarthur/Poynton 1999: 130).*

It is clear from this self-evaluation that a disruption takes place through a layering of structural fragments that signify formalist approaches to language and music. The importance of 'being on the beat' to Classical Western traditions of serious music cannot be underestimated. That is to say, to swerve from the conventions of fixed time signatures and metronomic precision is seen as tardiness or ineptitude. Similarly, in language, syntax and punctuation and grammar have systemic rules which must be obeyed. Smith, while deploying these conventions, at the same time subverts them



through what she calls 'sonic cross-dressing'. Such a metaphor (or metonym) is appropriate to the sense of a between space that I respond to from my experience as a participant in the intersubjective space of the text but also to the material experience of enduring the 'norms' of patriarchy, such as the rigid theological claims of many sectors of the Protestant church, Classical music education and traditional marriage. Although Smith may have reinvented a structure that is a palimpsest of many fragments, including random elements, the disjuncture and discontinuity she constructs are generated by an improvisatory impulse towards shedding the old while at the same time representing it through disjunctive fragments.

## feminist ways

In answer to my question 'how has your personal experience as a woman affected your creativity and the need to express it in feminist ways', she says:

*One of the really important things in my life and work has been trying to get away from what is conventionally expected of you. I think it's very important not to be trapped by societal and artistic pressures. This includes the sort of roles expected of you as a woman because women are still expected to conform to certain role-models. But for me it also meant rejecting the pressure (from my family) to be Jewish and to make being Jewish central to my life. It also meant - and still means - being prepared to write in ways which were unconventional and relatively unaccepted. So defining myself as a woman is very important but is always related to other things.*

*Nuraghic Echoes* is located in a lost civilisation in Sardinia and is inspired by the nuraghi, the stone towers which are the remains of

the ancient Nuraghic civilisation. It constructs the narratives of three women (three selves) in three places - ancient Sardinia, present-day Australia and a future global civilisation - presenting a shifting subjectivity and identity, a tactic Smith also deployed in her collaborative installation *Secret Places* with Sieglinde Karl, Ron Nagorcka and Kate Hamilton (see footnotes below). The piece moves between the dystopic and utopian space and time, finding a space that is unsettling, even for feminists: one that is always-becoming yet located in the space of lived experience and in the imaginal or the mythopoetic. Of this piece Joy Wallace, in her introductory notes to the CD, says:

*It takes the listener on a journey into the social and psychic conditions of the female self, including the specific inflection of the female artistic self and its relationship to its own fictional creations through time (1996).*

The central concern in such a relationship is place, and the self-construct's interaction with the sense of that place. Through the slow, parallel computer improvisations which Dean interpellates into Smith's texts, there is a resistance to time, a suggestion of 'a materiality that escapes commodification' (Wallace CD notes 1996). Dean's improvisations in *Nuraghic Echoes* include a recurring motif of breaking and dropping stones that, despite the radiant technology, renders an organic sonority that is more spatial than temporal.

In this extract from the score, the sense of spatial texture is figured by variation in type, case and punctuation, and by word-play and importunity that in recording become the shifting morphologies (see cassette #1):

Sound of stones dropping (15")

Section 1ai

Text with sounds of stones, clay pots, and synthesised sounds.  
Text performance uses three amplification sound structures,  
one for each voice.

voice 1: **is the past a cry or an echo?**

voice 2: is the present made of stones or stars

voice 3: *is the future formed from broken mirrors*

**v1:were the nuraghi fortresses cells or dwellings? were  
the nuraghi built by collectives or slaves? were the  
nuraghi born of classical tombs? were the nuraghi built  
to set free or silence?**

v2:a house which overlooks the sea  
a home which stands on hidden graves  
a woman scribbling in the sand  
a jacaranda speaking out  
in purple song

*v3:starting to watch her life in reverse, she looks on as the  
teacups gather up from broken pieces on the table, and she  
walks backwards through the looking glass.*

**v1:a woman thrown alone / pitch dark / a woman thrown  
among the stones / pitch dark dark-pitched / a thrown-  
out woman caged inside seeks / solace in the stillness  
weaves / the sounds of hidden stories tales**

v2:I came to Australia in the 80s. I accept Australia and it seems  
to be accepting me. I feel at home here though it isn't my home. I  
seem to know Australia though I know I don't. But is the real  
Australia the Australia of my imagination?

*v3:floating in her isocube across the compo-audio-space nooked  
stones are reinmaking henge stone sound from an historico-  
imagun-signal snode.*

Section 1aii

Digital tape plays 'Fissuring Silence', computer-processed sounds,  
stones and other(1'30").

(in *Island* #67, 1996: 136-7)

By contrast, *The Riting of the Runda* - in which, as Smith suggests, 'the pun on riting and writing is central' - explores, through a constructed new language, the fluid identity of one woman in flight:

**ICHBROHOB TISH EDRONE. RURUNS RO. EOB  
BROVICT WARSHAWE. WARSHAWASHAD. DOWIF-  
BRON SESH OBEXOBE XOBE. ICHBROHOB NUR  
PERWARWAN CHEBROCHA** (in *Island* #67, 1996: 138)

This piece 'intensifies the subject/object ambivalence of the female voice', writes Wallace. 'What comes out of the keyboard [radiant sound] is both determined and fortuitous. It is (as Derrida might have said, though it is *Riting* which says it) "both unintended and real". With a final incantatory flourish, the text reminds us, as it discards the past tense of "written" for the present participle "riting"...that...the subject - and everything else - is "in process"' (Wallace CD notes 1996).

This work plays with language constructed from fragments of original text, with an added grammar which was often overridden as she 'allowed herself to be swept along by the words'. Smith, quoting Pamela Banting, suggests it is an 'interlanguage' that 'slides between different cultures' so that 'cultural identity is expressed at a pre-linguistic, unconscious level, by the sound of a language no one understands and which exceeds every linguistic code' (in Macarthur/Poynton 1999: 133). Of *The Riting the Runda* Smith says:

*[It] is really all about resisting such societal and artistic pressures [to be Jewish and perform in conventional role-models]. The woman must flee from her clan who want to trap and silence her, and must forge her own language (personal communication).*

## hybrid space

Perhaps, as Smith suggests, 'the concept of an interlanguage can be used as a metaphor for sonic writing itself, which brings together music, language and voice, and produces - through their hybridity - new forms of subjectivity and cultural identity' (in Macarthur & Poynton 1999: 133).

My own experience resonates with Smith's, as I too have taken flight from a clan and from expected role models, and attempt to reinvent a space from which I can speak. In that trans-parent space the self is constantly recreated through the creative act, through improvising in the moment. Improvising moves beyond the undiluted experience of Classical repertoire, technique and appropriated form. Instead I embody performativity, where pitch and rhythm are merely signs for exploratory gestures, and language-as-action is a trajectory of ambiguous meanings rather than cemented discursive constructs.

Positioning Smith's work in this thesis has been a challenging yet invaluable task because her ideas invite so many possible interpretations and because the shifting sense of place is implicit rather than explicit. But, as in the works of each of the other four composers I have looked at, a resonance to place is figured so that the significance of experience cannot exist without being-in-place.

## deep space?

But what of the sacred in this journey? I wrote to Smith:

*Listening to your work, I am taken to other places, to a deeper sense of my self and being. This comes from a merging of emotional triggers, place references, sonority and fluctuations... Did you have a spiritual intention with any of your works and if so can you describe what they might have been? Or perhaps when you revisit your compositions, either in performance or listening, they become resacralised through process and perhaps take on an archetypal intensity? Is there a sacrality in the performance moment?*

To which she replied, cautiously:

*I think I understand what you mean, though the spiritual and the sacred are not terms that I normally use. What I do feel is that my work is connected with a search for the unspeakable: I am interested in expressing through words what cannot be expressed in words. For me this arises partly through pushing language to extremes where there is a loosening of syntax and reference. One aspect of this process is pushing language further towards music, since music is intensely meaningful but non-verbal.*

My sense from this description of the interface between music and language is that Smith's 'extremes' are the liminal spaces between meanings, where the unspeakable, the meaningless, the meaningful and the non-verbal 'become' together while opening onto a plane of un-knowing and being. The act of performativity in any event has the potential for deeper experience. This is perhaps the sacred place: a space of deep un-knowing and 'always coming home' as Ursula Le Guin puts it (1986). Through improvisation in performance Smith explores and expresses an 'always be-coming': 'Improvising in performance will never replace writing texts for me, but it can take my interest in performance, linguistic experimentation and voice to one of its absolute limits' and beyond (in *Island* #67, 1996: 139).

## Anne Boyd

My letter to Anne Boyd was not answered and when I rang her to request an interview her reply was curt and negative. However, during the short conversation she answered several questions on landscape themes and suggested I make further contact in three months when her busy composing commission would be completed.

It was evident from this brief encounter and from her speech and comments at the *Australian Women's Music Festival* (1997) that Boyd's way of life is dictated by her intense dedication to composing. Her iconic position in Australian art-music, as I suggested in the lead in to this section, signifies to me a triumph over the struggle to be heard and a major achievement in institutional terms, even though her status is always vulnerable in feminist terms. Unlike Bandt, Boyd has been outspoken about the obstacles for a woman composer in a patriarchal world. Ironically if surprisingly, she attributes most of her success to Peter Sculthorpe, her composition teacher, and to the encouragement of the highly acclaimed pianist Roger Woodward<sup>72</sup> who has, in his many roles, commissioned her works for performance and recording<sup>73</sup> and been the recipient of many of her compositions' dedications. As with Bandt, the acclaim and acceptance by male colleagues has been a prerequisite to success in the public world of serious art-music. Inside this public performance space Boyd's

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<sup>72</sup>These comments were gleaned from a paper Boyd gave at the *Australian Women's Music Festival* Sydney, October 1997

<sup>73</sup>The massive symphonic piece *Dreams for the Earth* (unpublished score) for school choir, orchestra and audience, was first performed in August 1998. It was commissioned by the *Sydney Spring Festival* (Director Roger Woodward) to raise the percentage of works by women at such events. Macarthur says: 'And Roger Woodward, what would we have done without you saying that some of the best Australian composers are women?' (see *Sounds Australian* #51 1998: 4).

compositions, often complex yet simple and minimalistic, evoke a privateness of place particular to her experience.

### one song from the land

In music which at first appears simple and minimalistic, Boyd evokes a sound-world in which place features in a variety of ways. To consider first emplacement, Boyd has said on many occasions that the environment of her childhood is implicit in her work.<sup>74</sup> Although she began writing music while growing up on a remote outback sheep station in Central Queensland, it was much later, while she was completing a doctorate in composition at the University of York, that her personal voice emerged through resonances of ancient traditional Japanese court music (*gagaku*) which she felt echoed the landscape of her childhood.<sup>75</sup> From then on, this juxtaposition became an overarching figuration which, rather than being a representation of sameness, is a tenor of depth and diversity. A more recent phenomenological application of this sonority has been through direct references to ecological and cosmological concerns, as in the recent piece *Dreams for the Earth*, written for and with school children (see footnotes).

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<sup>74</sup>At the *Australian Women's Music Festival* Sydney, October 1997, Boyd, a keynote speaker, gave a moving account of her life and work; in an interview in 1996 with John Crawford on *New Music Australia* as part of a program about landscape in Australian music, Boyd referred to the central motif of landscape in her works created by a resonance to Asian sonorities as she did in my brief phone interview with her in June 1998.

<sup>75</sup>It was in the orchestral work *The Voice of the Phoenix* (1971) that Boyd first expressed this affinity through Asian-inflected sonorities. (CD notes for *Anne Boyd: Meditations on a Chinese Character* ABC Under Capricorn, 1996).



How can sounds from an 'alien' culture - such as Bali, Japan and Korea, where Boyd has performed with Indigenous musicians in the process of learning from their traditions - express the lived experience of a dry, vast place that is central to a composer's aesthetic and *habitus*? Boyd's acoustic oeuvre voices quietism, a sound-world that signifies no-sound and the space of silent contemplation, where reflection can become meaning in a landscape of reverberation and stillness. Boyd achieves this through reduction, through limiting the tonal and rhythmic possibilities yet with such unpredictability that there is no closure or fixed representation. As Andrew Ford says in his recent book *Illegal Harmonies*:

*Her piano piece, Angklung (1974) has only four notes - B flat, A flat, E flat and F flat - [...] This, in itself, is a function of Boyd's source material for the piece, the gamelan angklung of Bali and Java, the bamboo rattles of which each produce a single pitch with octave doublings. Although the pitch material is truly minimal, and the piece itself never raises its voice above a hushed pianissimo, there is an element of unpredictability about Angklung. The little flourishes are continually rearranged - like hearing wind chimes in an intermittent breeze - and the repeated notes that emerge from each flourish vary in number (1997: 190).*

## silent sounds

As Boyd observes about her philosophy of music: it is 'an invitation to listen, rather than an imposition, or demand' (notes to *Meditations* CD), so that attention is given to 'a state of intense inner peace' that is 'concerned with the tuning of ourselves with others and with the natural world of which we are a part' (quoted in Ford 1996: 191). Clearly, this 'tuning' is a process for the listener and composer,

rather than a rigid set of constructs, demonstrating that the web of connections (to land, sound, silence, other participants and so on) is juxtaposed with suggestions of non-closure throughout Boyd's body of work. Commenting on the piece *Meditations on a Chinese Character* which makes considerable use of silence, she says that 'listening comes first, because through listening one gains an understanding of the universe. The beginning of wisdom may be found in listening to the sound of silence'. She claims too that the piece 'concludes inconclusively, on an imperfect A natural (not a perfect A flat) thus leaving the work open rather than closed' (notes to *Meditations* CD).

We could take a simplistic and essentialist view of Boyd's representations, because the 'gaps' in sound and the stasis, as for each of the composers I have discussed, signify space rather than time, or a sense of place connected by journeys through time. But in order to understand how such a rich sound-world of silence, interrelatedness and openness may be a metaphor for the sparse interior lands of Australia and a persistent resonance for this composer, I reach into and reflect on my own inner world and my lived experience in those places.

During my teenage years I often spent long holidays on a cattle property in Western Queensland and in 1996 revisited those places after thirty years. I travelled in 1997 to Central Australia, to experience for the first time the silence of the desert, the wideness of its horizons and skies and the Aboriginal stories of the land. My overwhelming response was one of peace, of slowing down and of nourishment by the places of encampment. There was an absence of

clutter and clamour, in both the material and acoustic sense, so that I became slowly more attentive to my surroundings. Within that attunement and stillness all senses became alert to a community of diversity and dependent partnership, to chains of ecological inter-reaction that were never closed in completeness. Sight and sound were primary windows and chimes into this universe yet it was through touch, taste and smell that I began to experience corporeal indwelling. The pain and loss at leaving those places was excruciating, a sensory annihilation, yet the resonances continue to resound so that I can recapture the sense of the experience in my imaginal world through listening to Boyd's music. This mythopoesis then translates to a spiritual dimension.

### voicing the sacred

If the ambience of Boyd's music generates a sense of the numinous, it is not surprising that there is an intended spirituality or sense of sacrality in it, indicating that her own sense of belonging in wide, open space as a child has been deeply embodied. In contrast to Smith who does not directly engage with a spiritual apologetic, Boyd underwrites all her works with descriptions of some aspect of spirituality. Indeed it is not possible to separate her composing life from her lived experience because for her, composing is her life and, as she says, 'composition is essentially a spiritual exercise - each composition, deeply felt within the heart (conceived as the seat of emotions as well as the mind), marks another step in a spiritual journey towards the recognition and reconciliation of the essential godliness which is in all'. Even the act of notating is for Boyd

'calligraphy', with 'each brush stroke being represented in a musical gesture' so that '[f]rom one [musical sound] comes two, then from two come many more. This process, in itself, mirrors the process of creation'; and is an embodiment of the acoustic imagination (notes to *Meditations* CD). She begins with a blank sheet of paper to which she adds each sound to the visual text or script, living the process through sensory acts.

During her keynote address at the *Australian Women's Music Festival* (1997), Boyd said that to be a composer necessitates total commitment. She frequently rises as early as three o'clock in the morning when the world is quiet. This practice seems to imply a monastic space where ritual, discipline and silence keep the devotee toned and tuned to what she calls 'the God-Principle'.<sup>76</sup> Boyd's language evokes a sense of the numinous even though her description implies a male God. Her body of work represents an 'intersection of Christian love and [Buddhist] silence'.<sup>77</sup> This intersection is evident in the land-marks or suggestions of experience in the natural world rather than specific places but also in the dedication to the craft that she embodies and in the congruence of art and life.

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<sup>76</sup>From the program notes to *Dreams for the Earth* (1998) it is clear that Boyd deploys Christian terms for her sense of the numinous. 'The business of providing a solo piano part inside a youth cantata was one of the creative challenges of the work. My solution was to give the solo piano (Roger Woodward) a narrative role, representing in *Dreams* the God-principle: he accompanies the principle vocal soloist, the young Tenor, who thus becomes not only the Dreamer but God's prophet; he is largely absent from the materialistic middle dream intervening only at the climax when the planet screams and he sets the stage for the third dream in an austere solo in which a chord which combines A and E flat (God combined with Youth and Hope) conquers Death (a G minor chord with added F sharp) to create another sunrise, another dawn. Finally, in the last chorus, in a duologue between the piano and all of the remaining ensemble, he represents God talking with the whole of humanity (Boyd, 24.7.98).

<sup>77</sup>From a paper given by composer Ann Ghandar ('Tuning: Anne Boyd's *Book of Bells*) at the *Australian Women's Music Festival*, Sydney 1997.

In her more recent piece *Meditations on a Chinese Character* (1996), Boyd draws on the earlier piece *Angklung*, 'appropriat[ing] material from the old work in the service of its own autonomous agenda'. She adds this comment on the work:

*In listening to Meditations, the Angklung material acts like a passage of filtered sunlight through the greenness of a semi-tropical forest. It illuminates and colours, casting shades and pools of light; backlit, foliage and flowers form decorative elements (notes to Meditations CD).*

What is intriguing is that this piece signifies wide horizons and aridity (resonating to childhood places) yet at the same time, through its textual construction, it presents us with sounds that are moist and enriching, from another forested land, an a-greened, fecund place of being, something imbued with what Hildegard of Bingen calls 'the Greening Power of God'.<sup>78</sup> Even though Boyd's piece is open to many interpretations, the metaphors shift from one imagined land-scape to another and act as layers to the palimpsest that has at its core spaciousness and breath, silence and subtlety that spring from lived experience of place.<sup>79</sup>

## improvising the resonance

So then, are there improvisatory gestures implicit or explicit in Boyd's sonic 'landscape'? For a composer with such a disciplined regime of composing can there be a momentarily process of events that could be interpreted as improvisation? And what of the pieces

<sup>78</sup>See Matthew Fox 1985 *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*. Santa Fe: Bear & Co.

<sup>79</sup>*Meditations on a Chinese Character*, for which the score is as yet unavailable, is scored for flute, shakuhachi, cello, 2 pianos, harp and percussion.

themselves, as sedimented texts representing an interconnected sound world in the biophysical environment? Like Hyde, Boyd is a conventional composer, but differs from Hyde because she attempts to conflate European sounds with those of Asia to mark an Australian landscape for audiences in concert halls. Is it then appropriate to suggest that improvisation informs these composers' works? Boyd was giving all her time to composing *Dreams for the Earth* when I approached her and so I was unable to ask her if there were any improvisatory impulses in her work. For a composer who believes that composing is the central concern in lived experience yet still has to balance creative time and energy with professional and parenting commitments, it is understandable that interjections would be onerous. So it remains for me to interpret the possibility of improvisatory gestures from my responses to her works and from her descriptions of the process of composing.

## becoming acoustics

The act of writing, as calligraphic as it is for Boyd, is the improvising intention at its most elemental. Sounds, refrains, 'becoming' from head to paper, ear to text, are created at the moment of deployment in space and time.<sup>80</sup> As far as Boyd is capable she

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<sup>80</sup>The act of calligraphic writing, as a part of the whole, resonates with the Buddhist traditions that inform Boyd's work. As Gerald Messner, rephrasing David Tame, writes: 'No matter how far back in the history of Chinese music we go, we find the same: that the Chinese associated Cosmic Sound with illumined, exalted consciousness. Cosmic Sound - the vibratory essence of all matter and energy - was in everything and everyone...and it was possible for man to raise his consciousness, to take himself closer to the Source, to attune himself more perfectly with the One. Spirituality was literally a question of vibration. He who succeeded in harmonising the discords within his mind, emotions and body could become a more perfect embodiment of Cosmic Sound, an incarnation of the Word. He who embodied the Logos was inevitably wise, moral and just; hence he was the most fit to rule' (*Sounds Australian Spring 1992*: 13). Despite the generic male terms, the sense of vibration as

recreates, calls up, a sense of being emplaced from the past so that the lived experience of the past resonates in her present through an imaginary sound world that is diverse and always becoming. So, the sonic landscapes she calligraphs resonate with her experiences in place which, at the time of experiencing would have been momentarily and intuitive. An experience of deep belonging in place, *habitus*, has the features of an improvisatory experience just as breeze, bird song, cricket-call or frog-throb sing within the moment, in the chorus of voices, in the diversity of the ever-emergent land. Boyd's act of sacralising that world through honouring silence for contemplation and 'tuning' her ear to the sounds of silence as 'becoming' music, is perhaps the most improvisatory act there is. It requires deep listening to place sounds and to the inner songs, to the vibrations of being.

On another level though, Boyd's music has an improvisatory 'feel' to it, to take a term from jazz 'jargon'. When I listen to most of her pieces I hear resonance to the moment of sound-making filtering through the structured segments. For example, in the piece *Angklung* already discussed, although the structure is based on a reduced scale of notes and the gentle shifts in space and time leading to a feeling of stasis, the trajectory of sound signifies a freedom that is never evident in pieces designed on the model of masculinist desire, climax and closure that our ears have been accustomed to hear in concert halls. There is not a hint of climax or closure in this piece; it exists in a state of suspension akin to silence, signifying an opening and a beginning. Repetition (of the four note motif and vertical and

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spiritual source that Messner offers is one of the unity of opposites (yin/yang) rather than a separation of art and life that has been the hallmark of so much Western art tradition. This is the unity that Boyd's music attempts to voice.

horizontal octaves) suggests waiting, and stillness, a preparedness for inner shifts in the process of sound gestation. That these sounds have been written down as a structure almost seems irrelevant here, so improvisatory in gesture is this piece.

In the piece *Meditations on a Chinese Character*, fragments from *Angklung*, such as the four-note scale and octaves, are appropriated in the service of the 'idea of music as a vehicle for meditation, for tuning ourselves with each other as well as with the natural world of which we are a part' says the composer (notes to *Meditations* CD). In *Meditations*, not only does she appropriate material from *Angklung* but also refers in oblique ways to other earlier pieces such as *Book of Bells* (1981), by including its 'opening sonority' in the first hexachord, and *As I Crossed the Bridge of Dreams* (1975), by using resonances to the *sheng*, which is both a Chinese character for 'sage' or 'holy' and a musical instrument used in the *gagaku* music of Japan which has had such a profound influence on her creativity. On her piece *As all Waters Flow*, for seven wind instruments, five groups of voices, two guitars and five percussion (1976), she says, that the piece is 'left deliberately flexible to suit the differing availability of [performers]' and that it is '[c]yclical and meditative in character...essentially unending and unbeginning. All the performers, ringing their bells, exit quietly leaving the audience with their own dreaming in the ensuing silence' (CD notes). The influence of Buddhist teaching of a *co-arising* is transparently clear here both to the listener and through this description of Boyd's intention. The recurring references, the musical *habitus*, that occur throughout her work suggest a self-reflexivity that continues to be recreated



through the circularity of experiencing rather than as a repeating motivic thread.

In Boyd's *String Quartet No 2 - Play on the Water* (1973), improvisatory impulses are strongly evident in several ways. In this riveting composition, almost every sound source in the four instruments is explored, creating an acoustic that is at once percussive, 'natural' (in the sense of an affinity to bird song as well as to unpitched 'wood' sounds created by slapping the hand on the body of the instruments) and declamatory. Drawing on Paul Klee's painting by the same name (1931) and on Klee's wish 'to be as though newborn, knowing nothing about Europe, nothing, knowing no pictures (or music or poems), entirely without impulses, almost in an original state' (notes on *Meditations* CD), the piece feels completely un-selfconscious, as if it evolves in the moment of playing and playfulness. In the first and fifth movements the composer's directive to the players asks that the fragments be played 'in any order, at any dynamic and last for any duration' (notes to *Meditations* CD), and while not naming improvisation, this intention certainly summons such an impulse. It is pertinent too that these movements for the composer relate to 'the harsh and dramatic landscapes [like] the desert regions of central Australia' (CD notes), suggesting that music, at its most generative, replicates the interactivity and spontaneity of the biophysical environment. The circularity of experiencing is replicated here too, as she uses a spiral as a central motif. While the spiral could be interpreted symbolically as feminine, I like to think of it here as a metaphor for recurring resonances. Boyd says in the CD notes for the piece that:

The work consists of five movements which are arranged symmetrically around the third and central movement which is itself made up of symmetrical blocks of contrasting material. The first and fifth linear movements are closely related to each other. Both move towards and away from a centrally placed musical spiral in which each player has four fragments of material which may be played in any order, at any dynamic and last for any duration (notes to *Meditations* CD).

In this page of the score taken from *Play on the Water*, the improvisatory nature of the piece is evident in the absence of bar lines and staves, and in the musical terms and variability of durations. At mark 20 the players are guided towards their outcomes, so that 'each player [is to be] quite independent' and to play 'molto liberamente' (very freely). Towards mark 21, the players are told to repeat (unsynchronized) 'ad lib'.<sup>81</sup>

\* each player to be quite independent.

<sup>81</sup>Score for *String Quartet No 2 - Play on Water* courtesy of AMC library.

Boyd's musical oeuvre then is almost the quintessential example of the existential and phenomenological elements central to this thesis: a nexus of land resonance and impulses of improvisation and the sacred. By juxtaposing these figures as a matrix, she does I believe produce an aesthetic that resonates to and mutates within diversity, openness and interrelatedness.

## Moya Henderson

The music of Moya Henderson, like Smith and Bandt's, sets out to upset the hierarchy of androcentric oppositions while using a blend of traditional structures and more experimental forms. Henderson's body of work, like Hyde and Boyd's, is formalist, mostly notated and structured by the use of the musical elements acquired through European traditions of music education.

Yet Henderson's sense of humour reaches far into the sound-world she creates and it is often through a sense of place and improvisatory gestures that this 'lightness of being' is voiced, breaking down any stereotype we may have of a 'serious' composer and breaching the confines of formalist definition. For Henderson, emplacement is expressed not so much as resonance to a sense of place from the personal past but as a cry for the loss of emplacement and ecological diversity. It is fitting that she should close this sounding on Australian women composers whose work reverberates to a sense of place.

### concerns

My impression from the brief telephone interview I had with Moya Henderson was of a tenacious and private woman who speaks her mind. Her refusal to be interviewed, while taken by me as a brushoff at the time, in retrospect fits with the honest and gritty music she writes. It is clear that her music, with its polarities of seriousness and profanity, shifts between many dimensions, expressing a

diversity of lived experience and an awareness of the diversity in the lives of others in the wider community.

As Macarthur, one of the first musicologists to speak up for women composers in Australia, writes:

*...Moya Henderson has been actively involved in challenging the inherited conventions, even though she has worked primarily within traditional forms and genres (Sounds Australian Spring 1991: 32).*

To be a 'traditional' composer has a 'serious' connotation, particularly for women who must 'take seriously' a commitment to working in the competitive male-dominated market. The issue of 'serious' music is one that Bruce Johnson, as a popular music and jazz apologist, considers from a political perspective:

*'Serious' music commentary, orbiting around academic musicology, has centred itself on formal parameters: music as a vehicle through which a privileged sensibility - the composer - explores the possibilities of aesthetic logic...Put simply, traditional musicology has been score-based, with a particular privileging of pitch over, for example, rhythm, as the manifestation of the composers' inviolable intent (1995: 243).*

## keeping score

Each of the five composers I have presented use 'formal parameters' in composition, and script their pieces visually through some kind of traditional score or, occasionally, a pictorial map (as in Bandt's and my own case) which subverts score-writing traditions. However, as Johnson suggests, while the habit of score writing stems from and is

associated with European privilege, all these composers have, through improvisatory impulse - which for some entails reinventing the score (Bandt, Smith) or not using one at all initially (Hyde), or using it as an essential tool in the spiritual process (Boyd) - express diversity by their engagement with and playfulness in traditional methods of signification. Indeed it could be argued that all five composers cited subvert score writing techniques to their own ends.

For Henderson though, the use of a score, while a derivative of European privilege, is a way of encoding sounds that make political statements and signify the shifts from seriousness to jocularity that are the hallmarks of her compositions. If she remains a 'serious' composer using 'traditional styles and genres' for her effort, it matters little I believe in the overall scheme of things.

## ghetto

What matters perhaps most in considering Henderson's work is what she calls 'the ghetto'.<sup>82</sup> Her experience of a form of ghetto life - the Irish Catholic community as well as time spent in a convent - links her with Johnson's political ethic of music-making, even though she does not compose 'popular' music. Henderson spent several years as a nun in a Sacré Coeur Convent in Sydney. Andrew Ford suggests that although she is reluctant to talk about this time in her life she refers to it in oblique ways, like saying that '[i]n this country, the musical

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<sup>82</sup>As Henderson says: 'It's [the Catholic church] had a huge effect on me, probably on my ability to survive, and also because I've lived in a ghetto. I've been getthoised and brainwashed...It probably makes you more aware of how culture works...' (from the transcript of an interview with Genefer Luff, unpublished, 21 March 1989, quoted in Macarthur, 1997: 317).

fraternity is just a tiny notch further on from where the Church is in its attitude towards women' and by writing pieces with titles such as *Meditations and Distractions on the Theme of the Singing Nun* (in Ford 1993: 103). That she considers the ghetto to have potency for musicians is significant, as convent-life could certainly be described as one that resonates with lived experience 'on the margins'. Just as the poor ghettos of America and Europe produced jazz, rap, klezmer and gypsy music, so convent life has produced some highly creative women and men, some who have remained cloistered but others, who like Henderson, have translated their passion for God into an outpouring of creativity. Henderson's status as a woman is also a ghetto question I believe, because, to put it in her words, '[i]t's that rotten unlevel playing-field that's the problem....It's still so damned hilly up our end. And discrimination is so deep in the culture that people don't perceive it; they think it is a level playing-field and that the only determinants [of the commissioning and performing of music by women] are those of quality and standards and all of that' (quoted in Ford, 1993: 102).

It is not surprising then that Henderson, after giving up monastic life to compose fulltime, turned to secular ghettos. In Aboriginal Australia and in endangered places she found the inspiration for her music. Just because she employed 'serious' 'notated' musical forms does not mean, as Johnson would have it, that she was entering the space of privilege. Rather, to the contrary, the traditions of form have given her a tool with which to elbow into the privileged domains of serious art her passionate beliefs in social and environmental justice, and she has discarded scores when she has not required them (as for example in *Currawong*, discussed below).

## bridges

After leaving behind convent life in the early 1970s, Henderson took up a composer-in-residence position with the Australian Opera before travelling to Germany on a scholarship to study composition with a significant (male, European) Modernist composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen<sup>83</sup> and music-theatre with Mauricio Kagel. The choice to study with Stockhausen, a perceived radical on the edge of Modernism, could be seen as a route towards deploying more signifiers of playfulness in her music through the approval of an established mainstream composer who himself used innovative and experimental acoustics. What is significant however, from my reading of her musical texts (which are often intertexts), is that Henderson treads a bridge between Modernism and poststructuralism by adding deconstructive elements to her formal, traditional works and by allowing her works to often remain open in form and to association and interpretation.

That emplacement is pivotal to these works is beyond doubt. There are many ways by which she supports a sense of place through improvisatory gestures: humour and playfulness, layered techniques which are left open to interpretation, exploration of 'new' and

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<sup>83</sup>The influence of Stockhausen's work as an experimental composer who combines Modernist structural techniques with electrophonic and improvisational elements is evident in the layering of some of Henderson's musical elements (eg *Sacred Site*) (see Scholes, 1977: 983). However, I hesitate to draw attention to this influence because by doing so I am both devaluing Henderson's imaginative contribution and perpetuating the traditions of adulating male 'canons' in the arts. Macarthur, quoting musicologist Catherine Smith, suggests that 'much modernist music and discussion devoted to it devolves as a covert form of anti-feminism....[A]fter World War 1 when the Modernist movement in music got underway, it was inspired by the feminist movement by a reaction against it. Feminism had grown at the turn of the century with the granting of suffrage, yet the Modernist movement indulged in a vicious backlash which saw women disappear once again from prominence and history. After 1920 women were silenced and ignored in music' (see *Sounds Australian* Autumn 1992: 9).



'environmental' sounds that often utilise her own improvisatory participation in performances and recording, and indefinite directions to performers to apply their own interpellations into the score.

Two examples of Henderson's works, *Sacred Site* and *Currawong*, are appropriate to examine here because they show the diversity of styles in her compositions and because they act as exemplars of works that are not fixed in rigid meaning-structures but open to multiple interpretations. They signify interrelatedness and non-closure in musicological and thematic ways. As these pieces have been extensively explored by Sally Macarthur in her recent PhD thesis (1997), I will engage with the elements that act as markers of emplacement and improvisation.

### placing diversity

Macarthur, in her thesis, argues that *Sacred Site* and *Currawong* represent diversity in art-music by women and hence show that women are capable of more than an essentialist description might clamp upon them (1997: 351-367). While I endorse this view I suggest too that, in phenomenological terms, a piece such as *Sacred Site* carries with it the experience of the place it signifies and through improvisatory gestures resonates more deeply with that place for all participants, at all levels of engagement. Henderson brings together her own sense of the place in experience and imagination, as a Sydney resident, with a much deeper sense of place in the collective imagination, or what Jung calls the 'collective unconscious': as a place of encampment and dispossession for

Aboriginal tribes and as a sacred site in (the sights of) the imagination of European Australians.<sup>84</sup>

*Sacred Site* is scored for grand organ - of the Sydney Opera House, the 'Sacred Site' represented by the work and in/on which it was first performed - and pre recorded tape of the composer hitting emu eggs on the piano strings, tram sounds, clap sticks, didgeridu, and jaws harp. The piece juxtaposes many elements simultaneously and linearly. Macarthur suggests it is like 'a palimpsest' in its 'steady stream of gestural syntax, [as it] relies on interventionist strategies which constantly head the music off in ever-changing directions, yet a sense of unity is achieved through recurring references to dance music, the sounds of tram bells and car horns, a waltz (which is a transcription of a Prokofiev theme from his opera *War and Peace*) and a toccata' (1997: 353). It is rendered as a palimpsest also in its overlapping of three periods of historical time: pre-invasion (when the place was home to Aboriginal tribes, signified by didgeridu, emu eggs, clap sticks), pre-Opera House (a tram depot, signified by tram sounds and bells) and present time (1983, figured as an icon, a sacred site/sight in the Australian (non-indigenous) imagination (signified by the layered sounds of the organ and fragments of Prokofiev's opera *War and Peace*).<sup>85</sup>

The improvisatory structure of the piece is evident in this example from the score where the organist is given latitude to repeat 'at varying tempi' previous material during the tape recorder

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<sup>84</sup>This piece is an appropriate lampoon to the current discourse of the Sydney Olympics (year 2000) in which Sydney (and its well known 'sites') is perceived, like 'Ayers Rock', as representing Australia (as a tourist destination) to the rest of the world.

<sup>85</sup>Russian composer Serge Prokofiev based his opera *War and Peace* (1945) on the novel of the same name by Tolstoy, using a libretto by Mira Mendelssohn (Scholes 1975: 617).

emphatic

Handwritten musical score for "The Rose Tree". The score is written on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo marking is "slower". The piano part features a melody with a fermata and a "F" marking. The vocal part includes lyrics and a "slower" marking. The score is written on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs.

## VIRTUOSIC

*Star right down*

VIRTUOSIC

4.W. Open C.W.

18

6 # 3

8

+ Ped. reeds 32' & 16'

EMU EGGS  
ON PIANO  
STRINGS.

slow fade-in.  
dur.: ca 25"

[During tape cut 5 the agent is recommended to repeat at varying tempi - the 1st two measures of the 2nd system.]

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in a single system with four staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/8 time signature. It contains a melody with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, Bb4) beamed together, followed by a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (Bb4), and a quarter note (A4). The second staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/8 time signature, containing a melody with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (Bb4), a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (Bb4), and a quarter note (A4). The third staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/8 time signature, containing a melody with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (Bb4), a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (Bb4), and a quarter note (A4). The fourth staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/8 time signature, containing a melody with a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (Bb4), a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (Bb4), and a quarter note (A4). The lyrics 'The Rose Tree' are written below the staves, aligned with the notes. The first staff has the lyrics 'The Rose Tree', the second staff has 'The Rose Tree', the third staff has 'The Rose Tree', and the fourth staff has 'The Rose Tree'. The lyrics are written in a simple, sans-serif font.

(Sacred Site score courtesy AMC)

interpellation. *Sacred Site* provokes questions of appropriation that have been simmering in art music circles for some time. Does the use of Aboriginal sounds sufficiently acknowledge Aboriginal sensibilities? Does postmodernism avoid appropriation by quoting rather than claiming, gesturing intertextuality rather than owning? Sue Rowley, in the context of the visual arts, claims that postmodernism

*is a means of interrogating myths of national culture and the displacements implicit in those myths [so that it] allows us to re-read history, to re-order modernist narratives [of the "Jindyworobaks" vein], and to recover alternative narratives that have been repressed or marginalised by dominant modernist art histories (Sounds Australian Winter 1991: 21).*

Bandt, Henderson and Boyd have all taken from other cultures in the service of their own art but Rowley is right in saying that in so doing they have, through a postmodern interrogation of cultural myths, asserted a deep respect for Indigineity. I would suggest too that their use of fragments and improvisation to create an artefact that continues to ask questions rather than close the door to meaning, underwrites respect, consideration and empathy rather than take-over and pilfering.

In Henderson's case, any appropriation comes from her commitment to human rights and care for the land so that even a piece like *Currawong*, an appropriation of bird songs, is a tribute to the part bird song plays in the harmony and discord of our lives. It is, as the CD notes describes it, an 'ornithological anthology of the currawongs, butcher birds and magpies in the wild' descending to and squabbling over the rubbish bins at a picnic spot at Barrington Tops National Park (notes to *The Listening Room*, Alpha CD, ABC 1994). True to

Henderson's postmodern style however, the final result, while a recorded 'natural' improvisation, is a layering of elements to make a commentary on the juxtaposition of nature and culture.

*As the composer, I saw my own role as that of theatre musician. It was my job to highlight the humour and competitiveness of the feeding frenzy and to enhance the listener's awareness of the extraordinary, twenty-two part polyphony that filled the skies over Barrington Tops guest house that particular morning (Henderson CD notes, *The Listening Room* 1994).*

The feeling that remains as the piece concludes is one of suspension in time and space, reminding the listener that this is only a few moments in one day in the life of these birds at this place. There is a building of intensity throughout the piece yet no climactic point as it is constructed like a series of waves of repeating sounds. The effect created by the recording is almost 'pictorial' as the listener's attention increases and diminishes with the accelerating and retreating tension of the birds flapping, calling and interacting over morsels discarded by humans while picnicking. But more than imagery, *Currawong* resonates to lived experience for the listener and provokes ethical environmental questions. It taps memories of similar experiences in the past while generating a sense of the present that respectfully captures the cacophony of bird life on the fringe of settlement. Whatever Henderson's ecological intention may have been with this piece, it is significant as a testament to diversity and song that create and recreate without human intervention.

## ecology

Other pieces of Henderson's also have a particular 'conservation' focus, such as her string quartet *Kudikynah Cave* (1987) in which she signifies the resonance of her own biological body to the cave as an archetypal female symbol while at the same time expressing the significance of the cave in Aboriginal heritage.<sup>86</sup> *Pellucid Days* (song cycle for soprano, mezzo-soprano, horn and string orchestra, 1989) is a collaboration with poet Bruce Beaver and celebrates love of land, shoreline and ocean in lived experience (Macarthur, program notes).

*In the clear light that heightened our perceptions  
we paused to watch the magic  
of fishes jumping,  
discover the still white heron  
on the farther shore,  
children rolling somersaults down sandhills,  
waves, sand, landscape and lovers  
move toward the paradise of night.*

*The pellucid day upholds us  
in the vision of sky and sea  
waves and sand and landscape  
and lovers who move  
towards the paradise of night.*  
(program notes *Ten by Ten* concert, AMC)

As for many 'landscape' poets, it is the deep attunement to the natural world which generates the act of writing rather than the 'view' they are representing, and a collaboration like this one is a call for respect and responsibility towards endangered place as well as an admission of a deep relationship with it. Henderson's music

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<sup>86</sup>'Kudikynah' cave (or 'Kuti Kina') on the Franklin River in South-West Tasmania was 'discovered' long after its Aboriginal users had been wiped out, by the speleologist Kevin Kiernan in the 1970's. It holds special significance for Aboriginal people and its conservation contributed to saving the Franklin River from being dammed for hydro-electricity (see poem by Tasmanian Aboriginal poet Karen Brown entitled 'Kuti Kina' in J. Everett & K. Brown 1992 *Weeta Poona, The Moon in Risen*. Hobart: Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc).

strengthens the poetic images through evoking the wonder of the Australian light at the shoreline that has inspired so many painters while also, through her colourations of sound, figuring her own resonance to place in lived experience that takes and promotes in others responsibility for that place.

Henderson's work, in all its diversity, exercises a relentless polemic that attacks the complacency of white settler communities while also evoking sound worlds that capture the spirit of place. Is it these postcolonial impulses that could be interpreted as signalling the sacred in her work? My hunch is that underlying her determined outspokenness and reverence for place and Aboriginal spirituality and her passionate concern for human rights is a deeply felt sacrality of purpose for the human condition within place. This fabric of her oeuvre may not have an overtly spiritual intention but an implicit one that resides in a resonance to *genius loci* and in celebration of Aboriginal spirituality and land. I want to suggest too that the 'flexibility' in her use of compositional forms and elements, including explorations of new sounds and combinations of 'new' and 'old', enriches her work in improvisatory ways that may be interpreted as spiritual through representations of reconciliation. Through this generosity towards possibilities, Henderson does, I believe, fall (or rise) into a space between that is beyond definition in structuralist terms.<sup>87</sup> As Macarthur suggests, Henderson has had an 'outsider' status anyway in the conservative composing fraternity, but, as this isolation comes from a deep sense of conviction towards fairness and responsibility, it is to be admired as a model for others and has

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<sup>87</sup>'The gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it forms a classic and all pervasive feature of post-colonial texts' (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 10)

been a source of inspiration for my work.<sup>88</sup> It is significant for the women's art community, 'serious' or otherwise, that this tenacity and rebellion springs from emplacement, from an awareness of the loss of country for Indigenes, from dedication to environmental responsibility and from her own lived experience of the ghetto.

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<sup>88</sup>See *Sounds Australian* Spring 1991: 33.



## diminuendo on women composers

Before I leave these women who compose, I return to my own soundings, to my engagement with Hyde, Bandt, Smith, Boyd and Henderson and my experience of them. While the connection may not be an overt one in each individual example, there is little doubt that the generative force for these composers is resonance to place, derived from their own *habitus* which, as performativity, becomes the compositional impulse. What unites these composers' works alongside emplacement is an openness and interrelatedness that, I would suggest, comes firstly from the diversity of their impulses as women composers but also from improvisatory gestures present in the works. This diversity of production - a capacity for inventiveness, a willingness to express eclecticism, and an aleatoric approach to meaning - signified by improvisation, comes from being-woman, from desire that springs from subjectivity.

Hyde, through improvisatory impulses which continue on to become refrain in the act of notation and performance, responds to a sense of place most directly and intuitively through signifying water. Through her lived experience of water-in-place she has found her most significant moments of emplacement. Whether these pieces signify a spiritual dimension or not is a subjective choice for the listener but I would suggest that a sense of the sacred bubbles through them, especially when played by Hyde herself, because of their improvisatory inflection which recreates out of a resonance to emplacement and to the process of belonging and creativity. Throughout Hyde's works, even in their intensely formalist

representations, there is a sense of continuing creativity and potentiality and a richness created by interconnection.

Through an eclectic set of works, Bandt responds to a sense of place in direct and exploratory ways. Her eclecticism reflects a passion for diversity in the creative act but also the richness of experiences of place to which she responds within those acts. While many of her pieces are improvised they show too a thirst for new knowledge and a determination to apply these knowledges in diverse ways. My sense of what could be spirituality in her works comes from a flexible application of media that is improvisatory in derivation, a commitment to letting the land speak for itself in ways which signify a deep attunement to place and its past custodians, and from the sounds themselves which evoke an interrelated sound-world that is more than temporal and never fixed or complete. Her acoustic artefacts represent the reconciliation process for all races in all places through (non fixed) time.

Smith, concerned with rhythms of speech more than patterns of pitch expresses the sound world of 'becoming speech' and its action in the reality of women's lived experience. Through these poststructuralist elements she successfully expresses eclecticism and journey from place to place and time to time. While much of the improvisation is left up to her collaborator, it is by the use of applied improvisation that she creates a sound and speech world that is always evolving and reconfiguring itself. Through these gestures she enables the listeners to create their own imaginary worlds where meaning and a sense of between make room for a deeper dimension.

Boyd evokes and bespeaks a spirituality grounded in past lived experiences of vast and arid lands. While she rarely deploys improvisation *per se*, the subtle shifting colours of her works and the directions imparted to the performers resonate with an implicit improvisatory force, suggesting a time and space beyond the spatio-temporal forms in which the music is constructed. Boyd's oeuvre, while of one voice, displays a diversity that could be read as feminine. The particular markers of this diversity reverberating through all her works are non-closure and interrelatedness, expressed through a sense of surprise and 'unbeginning' and relationship to each other and to the earth.

In all Henderson's musical compositions there is feeling of confrontation, of political intent and of striving for authenticity. To live in Australia at the turn of the millennium and not engage with land and class issues as a source of those concerns would be to deny their central figuring in our nationhood. Henderson interweaves concerns for loss of place and social justice in her works by layering oblique and overt references so that the listener is not only confronted but also asked to make her own meanings from signs. Without direct spiritual reference or evocations except to Aboriginal sounds, she concerns herself with the most fundamental religious belief of all: the equality of all humanity and responsibility towards our land. As a woman composer she expresses diversity through her multi-modal works which often meld improvisatory gestures and elements with formalist sections. In all her pieces there is a figuring of interrelatedness and non-closure that, while expressive of the diversity of women's composition in Australia, comes from her own lived experience in the world.

Significant markers of the sacred or liminal space in the works of most women composers are evident, even though, as McClary cautions, there is a risk of falling into essentialism by naming signifiers common to works by women. The music of these five composers is not just 'art' but also 'life', their *habitus*. As Simone de Haan, educator-improviser says: unless music becomes part of life - and improvisation is essential, he believes, to that - there will be no love of music or creativity (quoted in Smith & Dean 1997: 83), and, I would add, no *authenticity*, no scripting of the becoming-sonorous self in place and time.

**sounding 4**

**sonic explorations**

**sounding 4**  
**sonic explorations**  
**(cassette #2, CDx2s #3, cassette #4)**

The following essays accompany the creative work with this thesis. I have included these pieces as examples of my creative response to the natural environment, both through direct experience and as resonances to poetry of place. They are intertextual artefacts, representing the land-as-text through spoken word, visual images, improvisation, natural sounds and silence and examples of de-constructive/re-creative art production, art that deconstructs the traditions of creative expression to recreate forms which give voice to personal meaning and the flux of process represented by the 'journey' motif. In the Australian context, the journey can be a signifier for exploration, nomadology or the quest for a sense of place. For the female artist, who may engage with any or all of these motifs, the journey signifies an unfolding and a search for the liminal space in which to express desire and emplacement as woman-in-the-world.

**sound installations**  
**(cassette #2)**

*Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue*

*Sonic Arc* with accompanying score (cassette #2 side 1)

*Head Piece* (cassette #2 side 2)

*Sonic Arc* and *Head Piece* are two sound installations composed for the collaborative exhibition *Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue*. This display, by four women, Cath Barcan, Sue Moss, Julie

Hunt and myself, was staged at the University Gallery, Launceston, in August 1996, eight months after Barcan, Moss and Hunt returned from travelling together through mainland Australia and following an intensive period of collaboration and individual work.<sup>1</sup> Christl Berg, who had instigated the exhibition and also been its curator, saw its purpose in this way:

*Considering the fact that male myths have dominated the vision of the country, how will a group of women travellers perceive Australia in 1995?...[As the women in the project come] from a variety of art backgrounds...[with] specific starting points...they will place emphasis on the collective and collaborative creative process (catalogue essay 1996).*

Collaborating as women artists prompted questions of representation:

*How to visualise this? How to see 'the real Australia' without the endless histories impinging, each offering a set of eyes with which to view it? How to dig through the plethora of take-away information and ready-made interpretations of a continent not adequately understood by the majority of the population, and somehow make sense of it back here? And how to do it as a girl? (review by Robyn Daw, Art Monthly Australia, September 1996: 23).*

Seeing the land from a 'girl's' perspective necessitated new narratives that parodied gallery exhibitions and assumptions about 'framing' and viewing. Participants were confronted with their own disinterestedness and/or engagement in the acts of looking and listening as well as with

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<sup>1</sup>At the suggestion of the University of Tasmania (Launceston) Gallery Director Gail Greenhouse, the exhibition was repeated at the CAST Gallery in Hobart in March 1997. It was intended also to stage a touring exhibition but obstacles such as funding and access to gallery furniture proved to be insurmountable. The journey which led to the show was taken between June and November 1995 by Barcan, Moss and Hunt; I was unable to join them and made a separate journey inland to gather sounds in May/June 1996. After pooling funds to buy a Kingswood station-wagon, the trio headed north via Broken Hill, Lake Mungo, Longreach and across to the coast of Far North Queensland where 'the dingo camel went lame'. They then took separate paths - which included itinerant work for Hunt and Barcan - before returning to collate and montage their experiences for the exhibition.

stories from the journey. As a postmodern intertext the presentation deconstructed form, process and meaning in ways that were improvisatory and multi-modal. Each of the artists worked to decant and re-present collective and personal experiences of the journey, tourism and the land in their chosen medium of expression while allowing evidence of the creative process to bleed into the production.

## Cath Barcan

Cath Barcan's large black and white photographs, scrolls of colour photographs, optometry-like charts, and found viewing objects (pieces of glass, rear-vision mirrors, binoculars, magnifying glasses, Titan and Aldis projectors) asked the gallery tourist to consider the meaning of the gaze in the discourses of tourism, exploration, Indigeneity and feminism while also hinting at the process of production and self-reflexivity. In her artist's statement, Barcan says: 'here were three women across the bench seat of a Kingswood, the road tumbling out of the windscreen like a film'. Later, speaking of her artefacts, she observes:

*The work I have made is something of a palimpsest. It's a little bit poem, it's a little bit nursery rhyme...a little bit piss-take...a little bit homage. It's grief-stricken, awe struck, school book and slide night; it's cross-word and apology, celebration, letter home, magnification and eye-test. It's suitable for children five and up and may be viewed daily. Try to picture this (artist's statement 1996).*

Acting as the eyes for the collective, Barcan's photographs reveal 'bits' of the story, providing the viewer with a lens with which to construct her own interpretations. Her large black and white

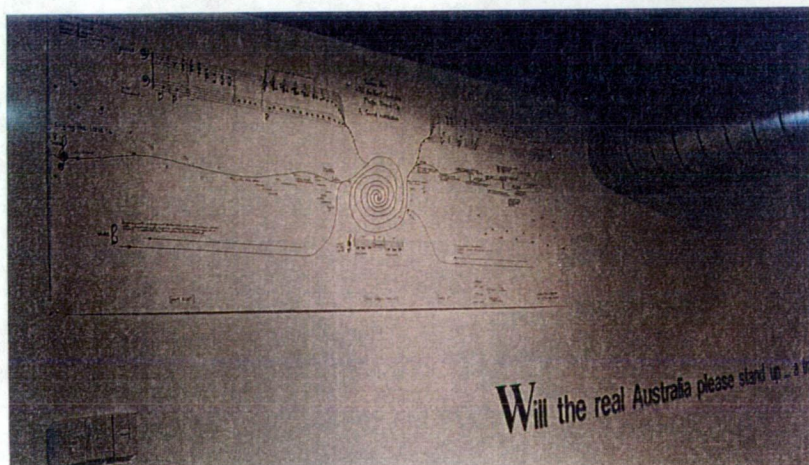
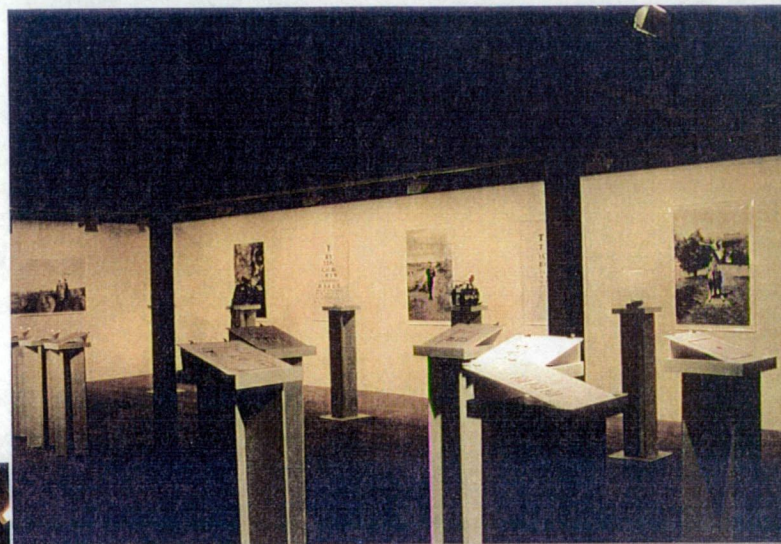
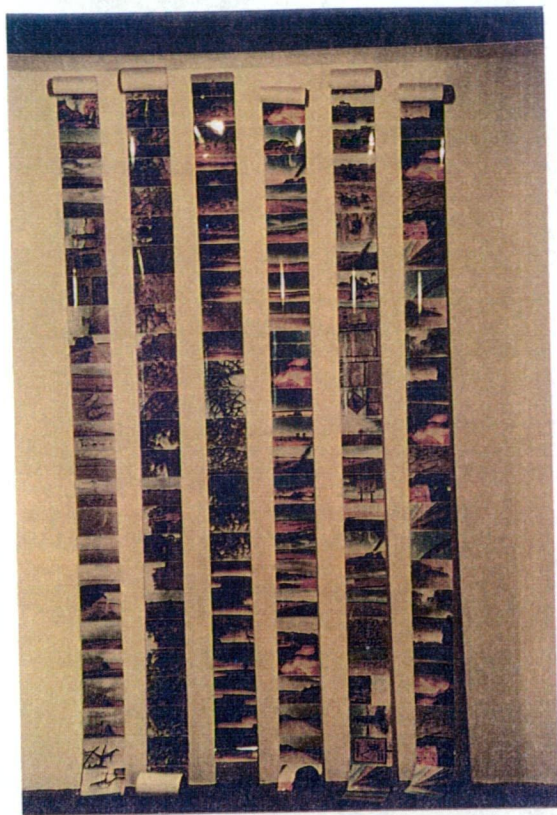


photographs are not 'pretty' landscapes captured by the gaze but 'scenes' showing human intervention in or interconnection with places, such as a 'bufferoo' icon/statue at an outback service station; a man and a woman beside a tent at a camping ground; a distant female figure (Julie Hunt) in the dry lake-bed of Lake Mungo holding bones to her eyes like spectacles, and two women (Julie Hunt and Sue Moss) leaning against a signpost to Huonville in a wide, flat 'landscape'. These representations could be interpreted archetypally, as 'face-value' signifiers or as promptings of political and philosophical concerns.

Six scrolls of colour prints hanging vertically on the wall of the gallery signify movement from place to place and the tourist's obsession with objectification and representation. These frames parody the 'snapshot' mentality while giving glimpses of experiences and places met by the travellers along the route. Landscapes, skyscapes and close-ups of natural objects and signs are juxtaposed in random order without any descriptive labels or maps. The enlarged 'optometry charts', positioned in front of the viewing objects, tell a story as an anagram. Barcan's collection of found viewing objects was placed on plinths one metre in front of the optometry charts and enlarged photographs so that the projectors 'viewed' the eye charts while sets of spectacles and binoculars in glass museum cases were displayed as artefacts before the photographs. The layers of humour and signification demonstrated in these examples are echoed throughout the collaborative presentation.



Will the real Australia please stand up... a travelogue.



Will the real Australia please stand up...

photographs taken at CAST gallery



## Sue Moss and Julie Hunt

Sue Moss and Julie Hunt pooled their skills to produce a multi-layered narrative. Using a series of 'sites' as parodies of information boards, Moss and Hunt deconstructed stories of explorers, tourists and their own journeys.

For Sue Moss, writer, the experiences of the journey were 'taken down' in diaries, scrap-books and body memory and refigured as satirical narrative, poem and dream,

*providing a glimmer of fragmented pisstake, eye-weep story....We're in the red country, the red road unravelling...cockatoos flashing pink and feeding on rotund clumps of bitter melons....The locals talk story. We keep reading aloud. Stories have replaced our speech. Written story, untold story, wind story, palms erasing the story-in-sand-story. On return I can't tell the story. Unspoken words boom through my hollow core....I dream in red and can't stop (artist's statement 1996).*

For Julie too, the journey was mutated from the truth of experience - the 'real' - into fantasy, as she attempted to re-present experience in linocut prints and words:

*Our exhibition is a play in the world of fiction...We move about, touch down, take another look, try another view. But the visitation continues, as when the little traveller I'm carving in lino suddenly asks for a telescope...(artist's statement 1996).*

Moss and Hunt's transmuted squatter journal entries, poems, diary extracts, log books and lino prints were transcribed onto the floor, wall and 'sites'. Placed horizontally along the wall in letter-tape and also printed on a postcard in the take-home souvenir packages, were words from Moss's poem 'Red Hunger': 'the body hungering for red she

gathers sand in slender vials some women eat this earth it's said'. 'The Visitor's Book' site acts both as a spoof and facsimile of comments collected from museums and galleries: 'Great. Wild. Evil. Thank you for a beautiful stay. Unreal, Educational...One of Earth's wonders...Congratulations Australia for all this!' The sites named 'Big' - 'Big Space', 'Big Poem', 'Big Country' - parody the preoccupation with 'large' in the discourse of tourism, and 'Sites of Scare' poke fun at information boards which not only translate and interpret the spectacle but discourage tourists from moving off the delineated pathways from which to view the 'landscape'. Moss's 'Cautionary Tales' is a pastiche of history, personal story and observations of representation and the iconography of exploration:

*Do not enter the void, the dark cave of the whispering lizard  
Do not open your ears to spirit dog howling all loss...Do not trust  
the stranger...Love thy neighbour...Beware eulogised nature....Do  
not place earth's red on a numb tongue...Defend thy territory with  
poisoned flour and gun This is my land won by other men following  
the path of demise...<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix C for copies of invitations to the exhibition openings and other 'sites'.

Big  
empty  
Big lost  
Big Burke  
and Wills  
Big Kingswood  
Big identity  
Big con fusion  
Big Mad Max  
Big Hall of Shame  
Big mesh fence  
Big Pro Hart  
Big Mythtake

Sites of Scare  
Site 3  
Cautionary Tales

Big  
Site 2 Big Po

**D**O NOT ENTER the void, the dark cave of the whispering lizard. Do not open your ears to spirit dog howling all loss. Do not read the spinifex-scratched message. Do not read palms etched with sand-sweep. Feel night's pulse. Love thy neighbour as thyself. Baobab Baobab. Do not trust the stranger. Love thy neighbour. Lock thy doors. Hold thy breath at unknown footfalls on gravel. Tense thy throat at the writhing shadow. Do not trust the stranger. Burrow inside thy mind-terror. Love thy neighbour. Beware eulogised nature. Do not place earth's red on a numb tongue. Do not risk the dissolve to a question. Do not allow potent hues to seduce mind's defended territories. Know thy territory. Defend thy territory with poisoned flour & gun. This is my land won by other men following the path of demise. Rational steps blurred in dust. Stars hurtling in streaks. Sun seep. A motten ball. Thirst. Do not thirst. Do not weep. Crows tore the landscape clean. No man could claim his scream, lips bubbled, cracked apart his speaking seam. Heads thrown back starburst crazed their eyes. Stumble & fall. The final fall. God help. Brave men won this land for me. Love thy neighbour. Do not trust the watching stranger. Do not be afraid. Travel in clusters, clumps, caravanserais of safety & sameness. Rely on the cameras nictitating eye. **Caution do not read this country.** Trust only what you do not see. Measure the 40,000 year old tongue. Beware the untold story. Beware the deified failure. Caution earth's mantle shredded. Caution two aged to dust, swallowed in air. Caution half-cocked triggered. Do not allow redness. Caution a mis-hundred and fifty thousand sand strangers. Caution a mis-hundred and fifty thousand travelling. Stay transient. Caution a kingfisher's plum-camp. Caution a diatribe. Quondong. Beware the plundering sites. Beware air-waves for the blind. Beware the reptilian eye. Caution a shattered attitude. Beware a person or persons unknown. Beware lightning strike. Beware the stone country. Beware the bee eater's turquoise. Beware angel fish. Caution stone curlew's cry. Caution a coiled serpent unrolling back to beginnings. Love thy neighbour. Narrative. Narrative. The stranger is no longer mute.

**W**E'VE BEEN big bananard / big croc'd / big Muttaborrasaurused / big pinappled & big-bulled / We've been big-eyed / big-mouthed / big pack-packed / big paw-pawed by big artesian bores / Been Kingswooded / by a big Red motor / big empty / big shrunk rivers / big Burke & Wills / big lost / Big identity / big Hall of Shame / big Mad Max / big mesh fence / big Pro Hart / big myth drive / big sight-seer / big con fusion / big caravan park / We've been big paw-pawed by big Red motor / big Big con fusion / driven night sky / Big identity / big mesh fence / big Pro Hart / big four-wheel drive / big flood / big stone curlew's cry / see big Australia before the big die

big  
+  
bor

## installing sound

I was invited to contribute a soundscape for *Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue* shortly before Barcan, Hunt and Moss set out on their journey. 'I can imagine this exhibition with sound' said Moss, and so I tentatively agreed to construct a piece that would extend the visual and linguistic ideas into the sonic domain.

The spirit of the journey was kept alive by postcards and letters until the travellers returned and then by many meetings and phone calls between members of the collective and curator Christl Berg. In these conferences we drafted and collated concepts, a process protracted by the tyranny of distance, as Barcan and Hunt had returned to Sydney and Melbourne rather than to Tasmania where Moss, Berg and I were stationed.

Although I had spent many holidays as a child and teenager in the interior of mainland Australia, twenty years in Tasmania had blurred the sense of distance and breadth in arid, wide and open space. In June 1996, when *Sonic Arc* was already partly constructed, I travelled to the Carnarvon Gorge district of Western Queensland to become re-acquainted with its sights and sounds so that I could more truthfully continue to construct the piece. This is cattle country where the Indigenous population is attempting to regain territory, and museums display artefacts of 'pioneer' history that in most cases exclude Aboriginal and women's stories. The pastoralists with whom I stayed, despite their hard-won life style and inadequate 'cash-flow', were complaining over a request by local elders for access to a few acres of

country out of a lease of more than 200,000 acres. As Moss writes in 'Cautionary Tale', 'Measure the 40,000 year old tongue/Beware the untold story...'

My dialogue with the land along the journey inland and West had been both fleeting and memorable, as it had been for the other travellers. As I raced West in a coach to reach my destination, I passed plantations of cash crops, such as cotton, that symbolised conservative attitudes to broadacre farming and the use of pesticides. I noticed the denuded ground on the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast caused by decades of overgrazing and clear-felling. I paused to take photographs of 'sites/sights to remember' and stopped at road-side shops selling local souvenirs and Mexican-style 'take away' foods. As we headed out along red roads in a four-wheel drive towards my temporary home on the cattle station named 'Echo', kangaroo shooters passed, 'doing the season'. From the disused shearers' quarters where I stayed, I walked across the land.

Although a Kingswood station-wagon was the carrier from which 'the girls' viewed the land, the feet were the feelers when they camped off the red road or walked around Lake Mungo or Katja Kjuta. Tramping for all of us symbolised a trajectory of yearning, shared sensation and following in the tracks of others, whether European explorers and settlers, Aboriginal cattlemen, kangaroos or imagined bunyips. When we walk the land is apprehended not just as sites for mapping and photography but also as a text of memories and moments of belonging. It sheds secrets, like embedded fossils, handprints in caves, and voices. The land hums itself into being, with what Frank Moorhouse calls 'raw undifferentiated sensation' (1990: 173). 'For the nomad',

Muecke says, 'Australia is...not divided into states or territories, it is criss-crossed with tracks' (1989: 219) along which the searcher discovers emplacement and stories of indwelling and dispossession experienced by others. Building ideas and products for the exhibition became another part of the tracking process and a way of identifying more deeply with places and moments of amplitude. 'We made a journey out of a journey, doing a double take', says Hunt (artist's statement 1996).

By the time I had returned from Western Queensland, sobered by what seemed to be an insoluble native title debate and evidence of widespread ecological degradation, I felt rejuvenated by sense of place and journeying and had a more integrated sense of the exhibition's aims. The sound installations became 'a recognition of my part in an interconnected web of responses to experiences of wandering, searching and reverences for the earth' (artist statement 1996).

### *Sonic Arc*

The main installation *Sonic Arc*, which was recorded on CD and played continuously in the gallery through large speakers, shows the influence of my interest in symbols at that time, particularly the labyrinth. During the early stages of constructing the piece I attended a conference in Melbourne on 'labyrinth walking' given by Episcopal priest Lauren Artress.<sup>3</sup> The experience of 'walking the labyrinth', presented in the group workshops, strengthened the significance of the image. It

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<sup>3</sup>Held at La Trobe University, January 1996, the conference gave participants the opportunity to walk a canvas replica of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth and to develop their own interpretations of this symbol and its history for their own narratives.



helped to conceptualise too the structure of *Sonic Arc* which I had already imagined to be in two parts joined by a linking transformation space that was circular in shape.

The spiral, and its evolved form the labyrinth, as a 'feminine' motif, is not a 'New Age' figuration or a projection of masculinist desire on narratives of space but an ancient and medieval symbol associated with rituals, seasonal cycles and sacred space. Rupert Shelldrake coined the term 'morphic resonance' to describe the collective energy which is generated by celebratory rituals like labyrinth walking (1996: 10;118). Retracing steps from the centre to the periphery before moving on is symbolic of rejuvenation and re-enchantment with the land and being-in-the-world. Walking the labyrinth signifies what Gablik calls a restoration of 'our connection with the collective dream-body, with the soul and its magical world of images' (1993: 47).<sup>4</sup> Most importantly the labyrinth/spiral was a trope for walking meditation, its ritual and potentially playful enactment, signalling to my imagination a sense of attunement to the possibility for improvised moments. By incorporating the spiral, footsteps became the 'ground' of the piece and an 'open' circle became the trope for 'becoming'.

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<sup>4</sup>As a unifying metaphor from many sources including Cretan, pre-Christian Irish and Aboriginal mythology, the circle, spiral and evolved labyrinth have signified dance, seasonal ritual, camping ground, tomb and womb images, feminine symbols like the Cretan double-headed axe, the urn, the cross and many others. Jung wrote that '[the individuation] process is that of the ascending spiral, which grows upward while simultaneously returning again and again to the same point' so that new and old experiences mutate and grow (1978: 249). The centre of the spiral, like Uluru, may also represent the sacred place, not in any final or 'conversion' sense but rather as a place in which to dwell before moving on to other places where contemplation can be experienced anew. For Central Australian Aborigines (Anangu), Uluru-Kata Tjuta, tourist centre-icon for the Piranpa (White Australian) journey, is the hub of interlinking Tjukurpa (creation) paths across the country, and where the spirit of all creation beings in Anangu myth has chosen to reside (Stanley Breeden 1994: 15-21). And so for Anangu, but also for non-indigenes, the sacred is all over the place and along the way, at the centre and by the edge of the spiralling, unfolding pathway of being-in-the-world.

Hunt says in her poem in the first half of *Sonic Arc*: 'the wood is groaning' and, 'the ground is electric/all night it hums...' While movement was to be figured by the discontinuous sounds of footsteps and the inclusion of the spiral, I also wanted to create a reverberating presence - a *habitus* of sonorities - that resounded to a continuum of sound and moments of silence. My recent experience of 'the outback' had reminded me of the 'deep quiet' of the 'bush' within which there is a cacophony of movement and noise from crickets, frogs, clicking spiders, footsteps of cattle and wind in the grass. The deep resonance in silence, activated by attentive listening, opens the ears to enrichment by that stillness. *Sonic Arc* frequently drops into silence to signify contemplative listening and the amplitude of broad, open space. I have added the sound of wind at some of these points to emphasise the cacophony in silence.

A female voice (my own) humming a monotonal drone (D) and accompanied by the sound of wind, launches the piece, representing the energy of Gaia or possibly the intuitive resonance of the feminine self to the land or even the emergence of sound from a spiritual source that is both silent and sonorous. The drone is joined in unison firstly by the viola and then piano. Intermittent sounds of footsteps and improvised harmonic, melodic and rhythmic variations and ostinati on C and D signify the intensity of travelling preparations and movement and act as a prelude and accompaniment to the voices of Hunt and Moss reading texts re-constructed out of the journey.

spoken text

The recorded texts in *Sonic Arc* are taken from Moss and Hunt's 'sites' constructed for the exhibition as well as from pieces written especially for the recording. The texts begin with word play, deconstructing common perceptions by tourists of the interior of Australia.

*This is the true place  
the real tree  
the genuine big dig sign  
the typical outback  
train truck trek track traffic trudge tread trail travail travel trip  
trick tour tourist territory tourist terror tourist terrain tourist  
tyres tourist transit tourist tract tourist traces tourist trance  
tourist  
tourist  
tour...*

*Big Country ...  
big empty  
big lost  
big identity  
big confusion...  
big myth-take*

*watch this space...*

*panoramic...*

*breathhtaking  
Oh!*

In Moss's 'Story', the subject, wandering between sites in a narrative of dispossession and dominant masculinity, says:

*Hooves have broken the country's spine...From the height of a horse there's no room for prisoners, I lift a meander down from the wall and pack the bellowing bag...sky's a kill. Some secrets remain unsung.*

In contrast, Hunt's recorded diary excerpts convey the 'real' Australia:

*Dirt. Thursday 27 July 1995. The soil at the red camp is crimson powder, very fine and silky. Kerry told us the women crave this red dirt of their country when they're pregnant. They eat it. There's no soak here...no feature at all just low Casuarina scrub...Museum. 2 August 1995. Museum at Wohan. A casual assortment amongst the dusty artefacts...The sign says, "We hope you enjoy your visit. Your comments please in the visitor's book..."*

The concerns and expectations of travelling together are represented in simple one-line phrases which convey urgency:

*Check the tyres  
books  
we can't take all those books...  
we'll never get away...  
these jerrycans stink...  
stockings! we're going to the bush  
Cath likes her outfits  
God! we can't even agree on packing a car*

*Camp oven, safari suit, paints and papers...wheel brace...spare wheel  
jack, first-aid kit, billy, pot*

*How's it all gunna fit?...  
three abreast across the front seat  
no room in the back  
we're heading outback*

*To the outback*

moving in, out and on

With the conclusion of the spoken text in the first part of *Sonic Arc* the sounds gradually return to the texture established at the opening of the piece, with viola and voice gradually fading to footsteps and wind as a prelude to entry into the spiral or meditative space. The 'voices of the spiral' sing an ascending three-note scale canon before

coming to the central core that is signified by wind sounds. The repeat of the 'voices' which follows suggests emergence from the centre of the spiral and entry into deeper relationship with the land.

Shortly after the conclusion of the exhibition, the ABC acoustic art program *The Listening Room* bought the broadcast rights to *Sonic Arc* to use selected fragments for their program. I had planned to offer it to them so that I could assess its impact on radio. The 'voices of the spiral' was used as a lead-in to a program on travelling through vast inland space on 15 June 1998. The effect, without the visual context of the 'gallery space', was strong and declamatory while also mesmerising and meditative. The combination of footsteps, wind and the canon was successful as a metaphor for walking in desert space.

The second and complementary part of *Sonic Arc*, which follows the 'voices' canon, attempts, through a more open texture, to represent a changed self-construct, one that has yielded to the land's deep voices and stories. Single-line fragments of Hunt and Moss's poems (spoken by myself) are scattered like dream fragments, memories or resting-places along the journey:

*the land is seeped with voices...*

*footsteps in shale, the spinifex scratched message...*

*walking alone in the stone country where no-one is ever alone...*

*this camp's perfected red...*

*you never forget the wind or the sound of the women singing...*

*we're too transient for dust to tint our skins...*

*a thylacine stilled in ochre...*

*a curled serpent unfurling back to beginning...*

The apparent stasis and openness of the sound quality in the second part produces an ambience in which to speak to and from the land. In musicological terms this 'minimalist' texture is created by layers of sound, interpellated with silences, that are simple, repetitive, pentatonic, linear and circular. Sounds of footsteps are echoed by the piano pulse, coming and going in wave-like patterns. Similarly, the simple pentatonic motif on viola and piano proceeds with improvised variations through which silence and footsteps interpellate at various points. Clusters on the piano convey a cacophony and occasional moments of dis-quiet. Bowing variations and octaves have been added for colour and percussive effects.

Following the last spoken fragment, 'crows record the loss', *Sonic Arc* returns again to the simplicity of its beginning. But rather than fade this effect out to mirror the beginning I chose to improvise on 'prepared' piano and add wind, anonymous bird sounds and footsteps to create a sense of perpetuity, process, cycle and openness.<sup>5</sup> This concluding free-form segment signifies too the cacophony of the land which is constantly in process, becoming audible following attunement to the process of passage, emplacement and transformation.

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<sup>5</sup>'Prepared piano' in this instance meant taking off the front cover of an upright piano so that the strings could be plucked and strummed. The other piano sounds in *Sonic Arc* were played on an electric keyboard in the studio.

## score

Although I envisaged and created a long piece as the soundscape (thirty minutes), I never intended to represent each note on the score. To fully notate all sounds in the piece would have been too laborious and I wanted the piece to evolve as an improvisation through the stages of recording and collaboration rather than for it to be understood as a formalist construction that could be 'read' note for note. As I developed my ideas for the piece I found Ross Edwards's idea of a one-page score as a 'mantra' increasingly enticing. I was excited too by Sarah Hopkins' use of one-page scores which utilise organic symbols, simplified clefs and marked durations.<sup>6</sup> The idea of a score as a painting rather than as a direct figuration of sound melded with my intuitive idea of an improvisatory structure for the piece. On seeing the score during the preparatory process, the curator Christl Berg, became excited by its visual effect and suggested that it be displayed in enlarged form, and so the score became an artefact, a representation that was visual, textual and sonic. The score is 'score-like', because it reveals staves, clefs, notated clusters, melodic fragments, reduced staves and directions that are associated with acoustic meanings. However, strict notated form is like a cartographic map: traditional signs are prescriptive and aligned to formalist gestures of shape and closure. In *Sonic Arc*, by juxtaposing 'organic' signs with fragments of traditional notation, the expectations of

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<sup>6</sup>Ross Edwards discusses his use of a one-page score in an interview with Judith Pickering (*Temenos* #2, 1995: 61). Sarah Hopkins' piece *Awakening Earth* 'for cello and cellist's voice (harmonic singing)' (1990) utilises a one-page score with shapes such as seagulls and rising and falling waves as associative with the natural sounds she imitates in performance. While the piece has set durations requested of the performer in the score, Hopkins' performances convey a freshness and freedom that only comes, I believe, with an improvising intention (see Pressing (ed) 1994: 43-47).

score-writing are subverted.<sup>7</sup> This alignment could be read as being implicit to my personal process of gradually discarding and reinventing the trappings of notation and fixed form. By being only suggestive of the sounds heard, the score precludes the piece from ever being played as it is written, because the sounds heard cannot concur with their visual cues.

The score is like a 'mud-map' that can be unrolled to read or walk over, suggesting both a landscape without fences or horizon and a sound-text that can continue to come into being or be discarded and reinvented. As a postmodern artefact the vastness of the white background against which the text is inscribed could be read as the sublime, the spirit world or tabula rasa. I have placed the footsteps on the score only at the starting and finishing points, to suggest that the piece has no beginning or ending and that walking, or movement, is continuous and discontinuous, as when we stop to listen and observe the detail implicit in biodiversity.

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<sup>7</sup>Smith and Dean refer to 'Organic Music' by New Zealander Lyell Cresswell as an example of a score which 'gives some information about the nature of the sound source to be used by means of symbols (animal, metal etc) on each of the three instrumental lines. Beyond this, the performer's contribution is left excitingly flexible' (*Sounds Australian* Autumn 1991: 39). There is a sense in which *Sonic Arc* is 'organic' as it was only ever supposed to have a loose association with the sounds it graphs. For a performance by someone other than the composer and writers it would continue to become an intertext, perhaps with less relevance to its originary experiences and ideas. And so it would continue to evolve.



Freely interpreted throughout  
Steady, flowing.  
Waves of dynamic range  
rather than climax.

piano

pedal throughout



# Sonic Arc for: Will the Real Australia Please Stand Up A Sound Installation

singing the land

voice

d drone

"This is the true place...  
tread...  
travelling...  
tourist..."

story...  
some secrets  
remain locked.

...The wind  
is crying

...to the  
outside...

...fumes  
looks  
captive  
compassion  
flighted  
lot

viola

Beginning with a sustained pedal note, improvise on these pitches  
with a blossoming of rhythmic patterns, bowing changes and  
silence. Suggested by metaphor, text, mood, colour.

[part 1: 10']

voices  
of the  
spirals



[Total playing time 29']

lungs

Repeating at a steady walking pace; not constant.  
[freely improvised, allowing plenty of silence, octave changes.]

[ 5' ]

Strumming piano strings.

d drone

the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

...the land is seeped  
with voices.

1001

d drone

legend:

wind

1001, frogs

cross

imagines

cardio

stroke-through

birds unknown

Andrea Green, August 1996.  
text by Sue Moss, Julie Hunt.

part 2: 16'

## *Head Piece*

The travelogue exhibition *Will the real Australia please stand up* was, in the words of one reviewer, 'unconventional and satirical' (*The Examiner*, August 24, 1996). If the strolling, disinterested gallery tourist heard fragments of *Sonic Arc* as she moved between sites, listening to *Head Piece* was an opportunity for more intimate sampling of sounds in which more satire was at work.

For *Head Piece* I composed a series of sonic 'snapshots' which were looped on tape and played continuously at a 'listening station'. A set of headphones on a large red box which hid a tape recorder below, invited the tourist to partake briefly of an auditory 'souvenir' or to stop and listen to a series of pieces connected by the sound of footsteps over gravel. The passer-by might hear a crude song in the Country and Western style which at closer listening reveals irony and parody:

### *Stockman's Hall of Fame<sup>8</sup>*

*Just fifty miles from Longreach  
The duco Camel went lame  
Said I won't go any further  
It's that fuckin' hall of fame'  
It's full of wide-eyed heroes  
toughened by the years  
Rough ridin' frightened horses  
Terrorising steers*

*There's bones an' skulls and stirrups  
And acres of barb wire  
There's a dummy talking drover*

---

<sup>8</sup>The opening to the exhibition was a spoof on openings and largely improvised. This song was sung by the four collaborators in Country and Western style with each of us dressed in appropriate 'bush gear'. The opening also included a parody of a slide show and 'souvenir' postcards, cassettes and catalogues were available for sale and the drinks on offer were beers rather than wines. (The text to *Old Matilda Highway* was written by Julie Hunt and Sue Moss; I wrote the music).

*Tellin' bullshit by the fire*

*On the old Matilda Highway  
A trail has been blazed  
It's called Australian heritage,  
No shortage of displays.  
Tough blokes and mates and battlers,  
Thousands of the same.  
Half the story's missin'  
From the Stockman's Hall of Fame.  
There's skins and skulls and stockwhips  
And lonely waitin' wives  
The car park's like a stockyard  
Big mob of four-wheel drives.*

*Through fire and flood and drought  
They battled out their days  
To open up the country  
So sheep could safely graze.  
It's not for the fainthearted  
The blind the dumb the deaf  
Why everyman's a hero  
At the SMHOF.*

*There's ropes and swags and branding irons  
And snaps of pioneers  
A dunny made of horseshoe nails  
Amongst the souvenirs.*

*A curious urge comes over me  
When its time to muster stock  
I head back to the drovers' camp  
Slip on leathers and a frock.  
It's hot and dusty riding  
on these bare denuded plains  
But I know I'll be immortalised  
In the Stockman's Hall for Dames.*

*As the sun goes down on Longreach  
We stare into the flames  
And know I'll live for ever  
In the Stockman's Hall for Dames.*

On the headphones installation the listener may hear one of Moss or Hunt's poems with a praeludium of footsteps. In *Crossing Mungo*, Hunt captures linguistically the mood and resonances I attempt to evoke in *Sonic Arc* and which Ros Bandt recreates so successfully in her radio piece *Mungo*. The ancient 'landscape' of Lake Mungo, 'the white stone road', sings its songs of the past within the present silence. There is a brooding presence evoked with the 'bloodied' knife and the imagined stories generated by the discovery of fossils. Through simple and repetitive improvisation I evoke an image of walking to create a feeling of sacrality in place:

*Crossing Mungo*

*Nightcold. We're on the white stone road,  
Crossing Mungo. Moving at walking pace,  
you make your own translation. Stick stone  
charcoal, bone, from silence, the feasting place.*

*This whorl, the earbone of a golden perch,  
spins into wind and howls south west across  
the dry lake bed, then lifts the dune to search  
for fin and rib. Crows record the loss.*

*The water pattern on this shell is bird life,  
a chattering, someone digging in the sand.  
There are fires in the dunes. This stone knife  
fat-smeared and bloodied, is warm in the hand.  
(1996)*

For Moss however, the feeling of pre-history is evoked by fossilised remains of thylacines, a thread of connection to her home-place of Tasmania. Improvising to this piece I tried to reflect the words through the use of harmonics and sparse dissonances:

*Beyond Thylacines*

*This is the country of crosshatched thylacines  
stripes and snarl held mute in ochre*

*Moonflood drenches the dingo's rump buff  
tits and black muzzle back-lit  
she stills to scent*

*Serrated palms cut wavering dark to shreds  
kapoks bloom yellow and acrid ants  
stench musk.*

*Not all will hear Mirragunna spirit dog  
baring teeth at dream's split edge*

*Head thrown back the dingo howls all loss  
then lopes across pandanas*

*Hot heavy night turns to sweat  
my fingers runnelling through matted hair  
snare, infer strange density.  
(1996)*

It was while improvising to these poems that I had the idea for *improvisation-image-voice*, the accompanying CD in this thesis. I was struck by the almost ecstatic pleasure of hearing sound from my viola and singing voice flow around the words of Hunt and Moss's poems as they were released from the mouths of the readers. Words, images and sounds seemed to weave into a phenomena I had never before experienced. In this space desire meets desire in vibrating and changing intimacy.

## concurrences

As artist Bea Maddocks says: 'In the end "seeing" and "saying" are the same thing, united in the new task of 'saying it"' (*Siglo 6* 1996: 21). I wanted all the sound installations for *Will the real Australia please stand up* to enlarge the experiences of listening, seeing and saying, to shed light, sonically, amongst the 'mutually illuminating' set of signifiers.

Ruth Barcan concludes in her catalogue essay that the artefacts 'might contradict each other...share lucky coincidences...seem to gaze at the same landscape but not always through the same lens. We hope they will also elicit gazes in each other, less determinable directions - "back" into memory, "inside" into reverie, "forward" into fantasy' (1996).<sup>9</sup>

## process of recording

Both *Sonic Arc* and *Head Piece* were constructed in a recording studio with the assistance of sound engineer Wayne Rawlings. Rawlings and I began by looking at the score and discussing the feasibility of recording improvised events, readings and footsteps over gravel in the studio space. Throughout the recording process Rawlings was flexible and accommodating to my ideas, often giving me free rein with the equipment and acting as technical adviser whenever required.

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<sup>9</sup>Ruth Barcan, writer and academic who has a particular interest in semiotics, feminism and tourism, was invited to write the catalogue essay for the exhibition ('significance of the site', see attached catalogue).

Nevertheless, there were obstacles to be considered in light of the feminist questions to which I referred in my chapter on women composers. As Ros Bandt discovered, the advent of new equipment often generates a revival of the garrison mentality in the male technocrat domain. My knowledge of computers and studio equipment was competing with professional expertise and recently acquired state-of-the-art equipment which meant that I was constantly faced with decisions that complicated the task, even though the final production's high standard proved that collaborating with an engineer was highly advantageous.<sup>10</sup>

In retrospect, working with an engineer required compromises in the face of my lack of knowledge. Had I been able to have full access to the studio in my own time and on my own terms there may have been a stronger sense of purpose evident in the piece, and I would have been able to extend the improvisatory and collaborative ideas. The alienating aspects of this experience acted as a springboard for the CD *improvisation-image-voice* because I was determined that I would manipulate the equipment myself as much as possible so that the process would be less complicated. As it turned out, finding more agency was not easy.

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<sup>10</sup>Following refereeing by the committee of the ABC's acoustic art program *The Listening Room* on receiving the DAT (digital tape) of *Sonic Arc* and *Head Piece*, producer Robyn Ravlich commented on its high standard of recording and offered to buy the broadcast rights (personal communication 4.11.96).

## ***improvisation-image-voice***

**(recording #3: CDx2)**

*improvisations-image-voice* is a two CD set of improvised compositions to poems by four Tasmanian, non-indigenous women writing to place and landscape. While caught for posterity by digital tape, these acoustic scatterings resound to tone and imagery and to dialogue between poets and musician. The improvisations play with signifiers while making room for shared moments. It is a meeting-ground where two 'opposing' generic forms can interact together. As a reviewer of the CD puts it:

*I felt a can opener had opened in my skull and that I'd gained a new dimension of listening. Perhaps it's the emotional response the improvisation evokes, and that it is very much a process about the moment that is always every performance (Liz Winfield in Famous Reporter June 1999: 58).*

When I was preparing for this CD, I read the poems many times and made compositional drafts and yet when the moment of dialogue happened, a totally unrehearsed musical gesture often emerged in response to the poet's inflections and gestures. These moments are now down for all to hear, defying any rules that improvisatory practice must join the ether after invention. Any cringing or hesitation post-event is useless unless performance is regarded as the only valid means of expression for this art form.

Were I to improvise again to these poems, as I have in performance, I would find other melodic motifs or ostinati in the moment of dialogue. I like to think they would be richer, more deeply myself and more reciprocal, more humorous and certainly more risk-taking. But some



would be much the same as they are in the recording only with altered accents, phrasing and rhythms. Maybe, with more practice, the poets would let their poems come adrift a little, to honour the moment of performativity.

But even though a recording freezes spontaneous enactments, so too does performance. The difference is that the performance, unless recorded 'live', cannot be revisited except in the imaginary space of memory. And so this CD could be described as a performance, a 'one-off' 'live' event, that has been captured to accompany this thesis, to honour the craft of these poets and to celebrate the becoming-space of creativity.

## tropes of the land

Each of the poets whose poems are read on the CD, Gwen Harwood, Sarah Day, Angela Rockel and Margaret Scott, listen to the land and their own emplacement for tropic resonances. Their connection with the land sings through as echo of their inner muse and is enacted by the writing process. By reading these poems they read themselves into land and place as they respond in their own voice to their own words. The addition of improvised music, whether as extemporised moment or as notated-improvisation, serves their sense of emplacement through resonating with the places they (re)construct.

For my part these poems have been like songs and to improvise alongside has been an expression of what the land and emplacement is to me: biodiversity, nurture, animal-voice, hope for acknowledgement,

loss, belonging and regeneration of scarred space. Embodying the experiences of this recording process has come through a process of identification with the places the poems represent, from the island of Tasmania where I live. As an acoustic figuring of the images by way of bowed and sung phrases, interactive play and the spaces of silence, this collaboration has enriched my experience of place. The CD represents a journey of discovery beyond the harbour of solitary core-learning into the shoals and depths of peripheral experimentation and collaboration.

## part singing

I cannot deny being influenced by the beauty, aesthetics and forms of the European musical traditions. By learning the violin and viola I subscribed unwittingly to the masculinist imperatives that had sedimented climactic form and closure and deified the 'big names' that were synonymous with 'serious' music. But before (and after!) Rameau's testament to mathematical sameness,<sup>11</sup> communal ritual, women's song and monastic chant resonated with the natural world's cacophany. Bird song, winds across the plains, whale polyphonies and symphonic waterfalls needed no logarithmic analysis to resound. This mutating sound-world is the omnific fluid from which I surface to compose, while sifting through the endowment of formalist styles. The intention to include moments of my own singing voice as companion to string sounds emerged from an acknowledgement of

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<sup>11</sup>Jean Philippe Rameau (1683 - 1764) is credited with having brought Enlightenment values to music theory with his *Treatise on Harmony* (1726) (see Scholes *Oxford Companion to Music* (1977: 855) and Richard Leppert 1990: 75-77).

this mixed legacy and self-understanding and from a keenness to listen to and represent more environmental sounds.

### playing the *habitus*

Playing with environmental resonances can be a metaphoric tool for reflecting, or subverting, the cultural factors which drive composition. The paucity of material comforts is a means to becoming, particularly in improvisatory terms. African-slave experience gave us jazz, and gypsy dislocation created the soaring virtuosic arpeggios that European 'serious' music appropriated and refined.

As a child I teetered on the cusp between the Protestant, immigrant, Irish working-class and postwar domestic dreams of the restored middle-class. Through everyday (improvised) events, a patriarchal education leached through that clamped spontaneous desire while providing me with literacy and musical knowledge. For a long time I buried the fun of learning to meet educational expectations and consequently lost the awareness that it was attunement to spontaneity that gave being-in-the-world its sonority and crispness.

And ironically it was the return to hardship that reawakened that freedom of expression. In our culture a single woman, unemployed and with young children, drops beneath the identity-building scaffolding. In this swirl-pool of experiences, lasting many years, I became less intensely devotional and vertical in my goals, and improvisation became the speech of every day. So my donkeys and goats were at

times contained with bailing-twine fencing and a two-dollar Remington bashed out paragraphs under candlelight when the solar panels were dormant. Concurrently, and not at all surprisingly, I began improvising on my violin, leaving my favourite Brahms and Beethoven sonatas beneath a pile of old books.

Musical improvisation is like word-play as it requires little rehearsal and there are really no wrong notes because you can always go up or down the scale from the one you didn't mean to play. It's a private and public habitation of being in the moment, taking risks and paying attention to your own, and to others', creativity. Is this why improvisatory practice has the reputation of being a vulgar joke to the more sophisticated musician? It is too ad hoc perhaps. There is no safety of delineated space, no rehearsed or recorded precedent to be embalmed within. And dialogue between selves in the creative event means loosening the boundaries between each other that we construct by formalist approaches.

Intuited sounds and formalist poems are odd bedfellows, as each participant is practised in very different ways of expressing their craft. The poet, after many solitary hours distilling words and phrases, usually reads her poem to a receptive audience that is educated, informed in the genre and used to reading poems from books in solitude. The improvising musician has spent years in solitude developing technique but is often quite used to collaborative musical events and performances and to 'sensing' nuance through aural apprehension. And so for this recording project there were some re-runs because the musician's inner critic, so conditioned to Classical training, would not let a scrape or pitch-slip pass untrammelled and

because poets reading their work sometimes stumble over their words and are unused to working in dialogic space. With familiarity, there developed a process of releasing the musical cell and the tightened words and phrases into a space of discovery and uncertainty, where they could mutate and hybridise. The musical improvisations echo their past shells, harking to a symphony of influences such as Irish tunes, hymnody, gypsy fantasias, Indigenous musics and creature-calls, but they live on too as public artefacts of momentarily soundings enhanced by the intertextual joinings. The poems remain as they were written down but take on deeper meanings through personalised voice and shifting intensities of the moment.

## shared spaces

There are some shared themes in the work of the poets represented which resonate with my own life experiences. These women are all immigrants to Tasmania and travellers between urban and rural experience as I am and so they exhibit a sense of exile and quest for emplacement in their writing. The poems also reflect movement from solitude to community and back again, that search which for women artists arcs between those two necessary worlds. These poets are women for whom creative expression has often come at great personal cost, as they live in a world where women poets and composers, despite third-wave feminism, are still seen by many as a passing phase or as hairline-cracks in the shelves of the canon.

## Gwen Harwood

Gwen Harwood's name is well known in Australian literary circles, and in Tasmania it is synonymous with poetry. Harwood left Brisbane after the Second World War to come with her husband to Hobart and to settle at first in the foothills of Mount Wellington. She later lived on a small farm at Kettering on the D'Entrecasteaux Channel before returning to inner-city Hobart where she died in 1995. In order not to be disadvantaged by her gender, she published early poems under the male pseudonym of Francis Geyer but left a rich reservoir of highly refined poems under both names. These poems though have not been her only gift: she has been the most influential voice in the evolution of other writers in Tasmania, the three in this collection being no exception. Her bright, kind voice echoes on, and along with many others, I feel deep gratitude for the time she gave to aspiring wordsmiths and astonishment at the genius of her poetry.

The dichotomy in her writing captures much of the Tasmanian conundrum and expresses her own feelings of alienation from and belonging to this island home. The grace, shown in metaphors of light and music, is met by agonistic seams which frequently leave the reader suspended between two worlds: the beautiful and tragic, joy and pain. On the CD, Harwood's poems are read by the poet Sue Moss who lives on the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and says she owes much of her own development of skill to Harwood's encouragement and craft.

In *Crow-Call*, Harwood speaks of the perennial philosophical question: how to live for eternity and in the now. The cycles and rhythms of nature are an overarching metaphor for the space of the *habitus* in

which past, present and future, life and death, good and evil, poverty and plenty mutate into the dichotomous pulsing that is 'light ebbing', being-in-the-world. My improvisation to this poem was a single repeating note (A) played with spiccato bowing to represent the beating wings and heart-beat that Harwood figures. Beneath this is a simple humming motif which represents the fragility of the poet's voice and the becoming-muse.

*Crow-Call*

*'He lives eternally who lives in the present' Tractatus 6.4311*

*Let this be eternal life:  
light ebbing, my dinghy drifting  
on watershine, dead centre  
of cloud and cloud-reflection -  
high vapour, mind's illusion.*

*And for music, Baron Corvo,  
my half tame forest raven  
with his bad leg unretracted  
beating for home, lamenting  
or, possibly, rejoicing  
that he saw the world at all.*

*Space of a crow-call, enclosing  
the self and all it remembers.  
Heart-beat, wing-beat, a moment.  
My line jerks taut. The cod  
are biting. This too is eternal:  
the death of cod at twilight.  
And this: food on my table  
keeping a tang of ocean.*

*So many, in raven darkness.  
Why give death fancy names?*

*Corvo, where have you settled  
your crippled leg for the night? (Bone Scan 1988: 23)*

## Angela Rockel

New Zealand expatriate Angela Rockel has been influenced by Harwood as a mentor and older poet during her residence of twenty or more years in Tasmania. Rockel lives on a windswept hill overlooking the Huon River and the fringe of mountains which hint to the 'wilderness' of the South West and is a keen gardener and beekeeper. When speaking of the creative process, Rockel expresses it as a space in which the inner landscape, the sense of self, meets the outer through metaphor. Her poems are generated by experiences of being-in-the-world and expressed in images of the natural world.

In many poems Rockel refers to 'Nellie'. This speaking a subject is based on her 'wild Aunt Ann', an independent, feisty and artistic woman who has had a powerful influence on Rockel's being-in-the-world. As Nellie she is a potter, and in 'The dam is hearing water' Rockel uses the metaphor of looking for water at the mouth of a local spring to express the feeling of 'waiting for words' (personal communication 20.11.99). In this poem, as in so much of Rockel's work, the land and self meet with mythopoetic sonority and the process of performativity is expressed through figurative substitution. As I improvised to this poem I was struck by the dark timbre and measured speed of Rockel's voice and by the associations of water and song with the act of creativity, the 'well's trembling throat'. And so my composed improvisation attempts to deepen the effect of those images and impulses while expressing my own sense of the immediate landscape - the context for the collaborative enactment - that the poem represents. I chose a strummed accompaniment on viola to which I added a four-note modal melody for voice.



*The dam is hearing water*

*They say you shouldn't disturb a spring.  
Dig too close, it might choke.*

*I'm happy to make my dam some way off,  
never wanted to trouble  
what feels like my birth-place;  
little fish glancing silver-green  
in the well's trembling throat.*

*Cupped to a rock-lip,  
the dam's empty ear catches this word  
and the sky's shouted answer  
falling from miles high inside cloud  
that has made its house here,  
where smallest frog is a creaking door  
onto a rainy world.*

*If this talk goes on,  
eavesdropping grass will grow  
till only lizard remembers sun,  
holding blue sky in her mouth,  
flicking towards me a promise  
I'll ride the lumbering hay-beast  
when water has had its say.  
(from 'Fire Changes Everything' in *Outskirts* 1995: 189)*

## Margaret Scott

In Margaret Scott's poems, humour and narrative characteristically shine through, bringing with them the light of the Tasman Peninsula, where she now lives, and her wealth of experience as a writer, lecturer in English and citizen of the world. Her poems often startle with their wit and length of line and they also often resuscitate past events or use historical images to intensify a sense of place. Like Harwood's poems, Scott's have a darker underbelly to which her deployment of

historical figuration frequently contributes. Ralph Spalding suggests that 'there remains an undercurrent of blackness and threat...that extends beyond the immediate sense of exile and alienation the poet experiences as an unwilling newcomer to the island' (1998: 9). This preoccupation with darkness is accentuated by references to imperialist images but more often through Scott's images of the land.

In this recent unpublished poem, 'Moon Bow', Scott uses the image of a new moon to captivate the intimacy of a sense of place. The brooding tone is generated through detailed observations, like the 'squat sticks dark with wet' and the rain 'fretting at roots and walls' and friends from the past 'shouting...in the heat of debate'. My improvisation to this piece was in free form, with the sounds directly reflecting my interpretation of the poem line-by-line and the reading/improvising event.<sup>12</sup> The dichotomy in this poem is signalled by movement between a dark, slow and low viola motif to create a sense of space, higher staccato sounds on a single note to denote rain and interpellations of singing echoing the feminine presence of the moon and the sudden appearance of a moon-bow:

*The Moon Bow*

*Clouds come over the hill at the back of the house.  
In the garden there's nothing but squat sticks  
dark with wet. At evening a bent moon  
looks out of the pine tree like an old woman  
who keeps a pair of silver dancing shoes  
in a yellowing shoe-box.*

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<sup>12</sup>For a variety of personal reasons, Margaret Scott was available for only one recording session and no rehearsals. I was acutely conscious during the recording with her that my theory of improvisation as a 'momently' collaboration and response was being played out in practice. Scott was keen to record her most recent poems (*Moon Bow* and *Bird Life*) as were Rockel and Day. This suggests that poets have a close affinity with the improvisatory impulse and regard older poems as stale.

*I think of friends in Oxford, Brisbane, Stafford,  
 leafing through new books and shouting  
 from cool verandah to leaf-shadowed kitchen  
 in the heat of debate.  
 Out in the night the rain comes in again,  
 fretting at roots and walls, loosening their grip,  
 edging them down the slope to the dark sea  
 as the moon on her knobbled feet goes plodding along  
 through misty gullies  
 and sodden thickets of cloud in search of kindling.  
 And then in the black pit under the hill  
 she lights a moon-bow  
 a ghostly, luminous arc like a dancer's spring.  
 O queen and hunters! You make my flesh creep  
 back to wandering life.  
 (1998)*

## Sarah Day

Sarah Day is an English immigrant poet who has taken on Tasmania as 'world-earth-home', to use ecofeminist Carol Bigwood's catch-word. She came to live in Tasmania as a child and grew up 'under Mount Direction' where her parents 'grew hot-house tomatoes' (personal communication August 10, 1998). As an adult she has moved between urban and rural spaces, both in Tasmania and Europe, and many of her poems are detailed glimpses of place, people-in-place and her own thoughts and feelings of being-in-the-world. In all their rich diversity, her poems spring from experience, from that hub of knowing which is for the female poet both the muse and the act of writing itself.

In 'Eating the Sea' the rhythm and sound of the waves cut through, just as the island coastline crimples the edge of the Tasmanian landscape. Day's musicality is sounded here by her deployment of repeating words and phrases and in the wash and bounce of the

images.<sup>13</sup> As with Scott and Harwood's poems, there is a tension of tone that is exalted and yet measured and cautious. There are resonances here also to Harwood's philosophical tones but the dominant feeling is phenomenological for the subject 'sitting on the shore...listening to the dredge that follows every dump...brushing through my head'. My simple and 'prepared' viola improvisation for this poem sought to evoke the rhythmical dumping of the waves and the delicate shifts in colour by repeated string crossings on a C octave and dissonant 9ths and 10ths.

### *Eating the Sea*

*This mechanical endless dumping, the combing of water  
through pebble bank, sitting on the shore in the spray,*

*listening to the dredge that follows every dump  
is like having my hair brushed firmly,*

*each stroke from the roots; brushing, brushing out tangles,  
debris, bits of leaf, seaweed, feather,*

*brushing from the roots, brushing through my head,  
combing through me as if my atoms were countless round stones.*

*Water combing through them, through me, washing,  
rearranging particles, with a thunderous, a marvellous knocking of rock*

*on rock and drawing of water to wave.*

*I am eating sandwiches at the sea's edge, biting salt air,*

*swallowing the motion of the waves as they motion through me;  
eating the sea with lunch and it is consuming me.*

*(from A Madder Dance 1991: 13)*

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<sup>13</sup>Sarah Day sings in an a cappella women's trio.

## reflections

Gwen Harwood in 'Reflections' says, 'two worlds meet in the mirror/ of the quiet dam'. This line expresses my still-evolving, ever changing understanding of the intertextual process represented by this explorative CD. Words and improvisation seemed like worlds apart when we began but in coming together they took a deeper plunge into intersubjective space where there is always more laughter, play and the potential for intimate journeys. Improvisation, the cell from which all modalities begin, has provided a sound-world for those possibilities, a space in which to take flight and to become.

## process of recording *improvisation-image-voice*

When I began to record this CD, I made use of the 'communal' recording studio at the Conservatorium of Music of the University of Tasmania as part of my privileges as a postgraduate student. My intention was to read the poems written by the chosen four poets and multi-track layers of sonic improvisations over them, as I had done for *Sonic Arc* and *Head Piece*. My first task, in the process of understanding what I wanted to create, was to gain knowledge in a field traditionally garrisoned by male technocrats. Though I had some experience with sound equipment, I was new to computer software that functioned as a mixing desk. Finding a teacher within the Conservatorium to show me the 'pots and faders', as they say in the trade, and being able to have uninterrupted time in the studio, were essential to learning the skills.

## blocks to sounding

Several obstacles presented themselves within a few days of working in the studio:

### 1. Access.

I was denied 'after hours' access while security for the building was being upgraded. I discovered later that other postgraduates had after-hours access and that the real issue was my invisibility. (Since I had moved to the School of English I was not a regular user.) I wasted a great deal of time trying to gain access by finding security men to open doors, making appointments with staff who had the power to deliver key authority and making unnecessary trips to check on access. A sense of inhospitability stalled my creative process and I consoled myself with a comment I heard about a famous male composer whose notational skills 'took twenty years to catch up to his imagination'! At this rate I would be a recording engineer well after my useby date.

On reflection I feel that my invisibility, and consequent denial of access, is a feminist issue. All the staff I contacted, both for teaching and security, were men and while they were not overtly dismissive or sexist, I did not feel that I was taken seriously except by one fellow composer who was generous with encouragement but limited in time (and he treated me more favourably perhaps because I had written a review of one of his works in a prominent arts magazine or because we had become acquainted as fellow postgraduates over some months previously).

## 2. Knowledge of equipment.

My understanding of the equipment hinged on two variables: being shown how to use it and finding the equipment as I had left it when I returned to continue working. Both of these prerequisites developed into insurmountable problems as the weeks passed. I had deliberately and cautiously waited until the close of the semester so I would have unlimited access to studio and staff but this consideration worked against me because the situation was less structured and predictable and because it was harder to track down staff and students for assistance.

Two staff members responsible for audio-technology equipment were 'too busy' to spend time teaching me in the studio, and the postgraduate student I located for help spoke to me in a jargon well beyond my experience. He was also often unavailable, fleeting in his appearances and too quick with his demonstrations for me to absorb the information. If, by trial and error, I managed to make sense of the equipment, when I returned there would be so many changes to the set up that it would often take two hours to reestablish my tasks. By that time, I was often too stressed to make significant recording progress or another user would need the studio space.

## 3 Computer problems.

An even greater obstacle to progress was the fragmentation of the file on which recordings were saved. I was told that the reasons for this were that too many students used the computer and that the software needed to be reinstalled. However, even after it was reinstalled there was little change, and following a few minutes of recording the computer would freeze in record mode.

In desperation and discovering there was some research funding available from the School of English, I purchased an external hard disk to take with me to the studio on the advice of a well-informed postgraduate. This piece of equipment made things slightly easier but because the computer problems were mostly out of my control, I was unable to make full use of it in the studio and instead found related uses for it on my home computer.

## re-constructions

During the six weeks or so of this difficult learning process, I underwent a change in attitude. Not only was the Conservatorium studio inappropriate as a location in which to record the poems and improvisations - the inhospitable climate seeped from the equipment and space - but if the poems were embodiments of their writers, and vice versa, then why was I not working with the poets themselves? As far as my own musicianship was concerned, the strangled studio scenario was part of my learning process and I needed to take up the reins and move to an affirming location and a more malleable set of 'radiant' machines.<sup>14</sup> After approaching each of the three poets hesitantly with a request to collaborate and finding them all enthusiastic, I decided to hire a portable recording studio and make a

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<sup>14</sup>As I learned from a paper ('Radiant' given by Frances Dyson) at the *Australian Women's Music Festival* (Sydney 1997), 'radiance' is, largely thanks to John Cage's experiments, a metaphor for audio art machinery and its product: hypermedia. Dyson says: 'The concept of radiance suggests a compromise between the object and the event - it connotes a sense of organic process, of movement, change and complexity, whilst maintaining a sense of identity and individuality...if media tends to objectify sound, to remove it from nature and to denude its 'body', then radiance restores a different kind of animation via the electrification and amplification of sound which is inherent to media processes' (published in *Sounds Australian* #51, 1998: 26).



'live' recording of the poets reading their own poems 'at home' to my improvisations. There would be no multi-tracking and only minimal mastering in the studio at the end of the process. In comparison to the refined 'studio sounds' of *Sonic Arc* and *Head Piece*, this recording would literally 'echo' its surroundings.<sup>15</sup>

It was ironic, in retrospect, given the centrality of 'place' to the project, that the sense of placelessness - an inability to 'settle' in that dystopian hyper-environment - was central to feeling disembodied. Moving on to emplacement, to working 'at home' with the poets themselves, became affirmative almost immediately. From the moment of that decision, the process took on new meaning as a collaboration instead of frustration as a contrived experiment. I consoled myself with the thought that I had years ahead of me to learn the language of 'radiance' and that for this task it was only a burden.

## Gwen Harwood's inspiration

It is crucial here to mention the importance of Gwen Harwood to this project. As a fledgling writer I had sent poems to her and been rewarded by her response. When attending her readings, writers' workshops and meetings,<sup>16</sup> I had always found her inspiring, full of enthusiasm and committed to encouraging struggling writers. The

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<sup>15</sup>As it says in the cover notes to the CD '[e]ven the places where the events happened have a variable resonance, as the listener will hear' (breen 1998). In the recording of Rockel's poems for example, the cavernous space of her mud-brick house gives the sound a 'reverb' quality compared to say Day's poems which sound more intimate, reflecting the tiny lounge room in which they were recorded.

<sup>16</sup>Gwen Harwood was the greatly revered president of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (Tasmanian division) when I attended the meetings in Hobart during the late 1980s.

metaphors which saturated her poetry came from a deep love and knowledge of music and German culture as well as from an awareness of the darker side of the ideals to which she aspired.<sup>17</sup> The prevailing tension in her work as well as the musical references and love of language provided a point of connection between us.<sup>18</sup>

When I was searching for poems of place, Judith Wright and Gwen Harwood's poems took me by the throat as they had at previous times. Both these poets fall into that generation of women poets up against the canon and they each express the voice of the woman in-struggle and in-place. Due to time and money constraints, and to the growing awareness that if the CD was about place it should also speak from my own place - Tasmania - I decided to use only Tasmanian women poets, and to move in a small circle from Harwood as centre. I knew that she had influenced most poets in Tasmania and so I chose three poets whose work both resonated to place and structurally showed some similarity to and influence of Harwood's work. Removing Wright's work and that of some younger poets from the project was disappointing but Wright's 'consciousness' has been so imbibed over many years that her presence is sewn into the fabric of the CD. By reducing my collection to these four poets I could also show some generational contrasts and so I chose Margaret Scott, close to Harwood's generation, and two poets of my own generation, Angela Rockel and Sarah Day, to represent poets born after World War Two: the 'baby boomers'.

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<sup>17</sup>See Alison Hoddinott (ed) 1990 *Blessed City: Letters of Gwen Harwood to Thomas Riddell 1943*. North Ryde: Imprint, p1-8.

<sup>18</sup>As Ralph Spalding suggests, '[i]n the literature of Tasmania there appear to be two contrasting sets of rhetorical figures that have evolved in response to the Tasmanian environment: the gothic and utopian and that of home and exile' (1998: 6). In the poets represented on this CD, this dichotomy is most evident in Harwood and Scott's work and to a lesser extent in Day's. Rockel's poems are, I believe, too complex to describe in these terms.

But who was to read Harwood's poems? Most of the trying time in the Conservatorium studio had been spent recording my own voice reading her poems over which I had planned to 'dub' improvisations and sound textures. With my revised plan, and because Harwood was no longer with us, I needed a reader so I could improvise as the poems were being read. After some consideration, sense of place became the deciding factor. Sue Moss, herself a poet, owed much to Harwood's teaching and example but more importantly, lived close to the D'Entrecasteux Channel as had Harwood. This location and Harwood's observation of the details of the landscape resonated with Moss's sense of place.

## beginnings

I began the recording process with the poems of Harwood in the studio but did not finally record Moss reading Harwood's work until I had finished recording each of the other three poets. As I knew Rockel personally and as I had lived for thirteen years in a valley below the hilltop which was her home, I felt I knew the 'body of images' that fills her poems, and so I decided to begin by recording her work. My beginnings were tremulous and Rockel's readings were at first so disrupted by my playing that they lost their edge of accent and phrasing. My improvisations initially felt fumbling and stale. With the help of some home brew stout to relax, we ploughed on, recording and discarding, until, through increasing familiarity with equipment and the form of interaction, a sense of embodiment and ricochet emerged.

## recording and composing

Once I had moved away from the studio and its destructive effect on my creativity, not to mention my health, creating new textures soon became a joyous activity. Whenever there was an impediment to progress due to lack of technical knowledge, I sought guidance from the professional sound engineer, Eddie Malovnek, from whom I had hired the equipment. He was generous with advice and long-suffering with my questions but as he had no musical skills or sensitivity to nuance, I was left to cope alone with my trials and errors.

## coming together

After I had contacted all the poets with the suggestion that we record together, I spent many hours reading poems, attempting to take them into my own inner world. I reflected on composer Aaron Copeland's comment that 'poets were [wo]men who were trying to make music with nothing but words at their command...and that beyond the music of both arts there is an essence that joins them - an area where the meanings behind the notes and the meaning beyond the words spring from some common source' (1966: 2). In phenomenological-psychotherapeutic terms, I 'indwelt' the poems until a sense of their becoming met the source of my refrains. Or, in Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation, the 'lived body' and the poem (object) circulated in and through each other by reflection and imagination. I spent many hours sitting with a notebook and pencil, viola and poetry book, reading, visualising, listening in the stillness of

my imagination, playing fragments and jotting down words or notes for when we came to collaborate in recording.

Some phrases quickly became firm ground for a through-composition. While improvising to a poem I often used a skeleton score but allowed the reading-in-recording and its imagery to dictate the timing and dissemination of those notes. A good example of this style of improvisation-composition is the one which accompanies the poem 'Carapace' by Gwen Harwood. The word 'carapace' signalled to me roundness, spiralling movement and a security/vulnerability in simplicity that is the 'refrain' that Deleuze and Guattari speak of. In the poem the shell becomes a metaphor for healing, a symbol of the connective tissue between fragility and beauty, death and life. While, as Spalding and others suggest, Harwood's poems are crisscrossed with tracks of opposites, they can also be read as subverting these binarisms, creating a space of 'ebb, flow, [and] metamorphosis' and needless-to-say, non-closure.

### *Carapace*

*Hold in the hollow of your palm  
this carapace so delicate  
one breath would send it spinning down,  
yet strong enough to bear the stress  
of ebb, flow, metamorphosis  
from skin to shell.*

seasons have scoured  
this beautiful abandoned house  
from which are gone eyes, sinews, all  
taken-for-granted gifts.

*I hold  
in my unhoused continuing self  
the memory that is wisdom's price  
for what survives and grows beneath  
old skies, old stars.*

*Fresh mornings rim  
the carapace of night with gold.  
The sandgrains shine, the rockpools brim  
with tides that bring and bear away  
new healing images of day.  
(from Bone Scan 1988: 56)*

Harwood's writing often speaks of the double-edged experience of being-in-the-world and of staying-in-place, being both at home and abandoned, dispossessed, alien and yet somehow emplaced within a beautiful land. In the improvised composition to accompany this poem, a three-note, chromatic motif on the A string is repeated in various modes, rhythms, bowing styles and dynamics, signifying change, death and rebirth, fragility and self-reflexivity.<sup>19</sup> This skeletal musical gesture is an acoustic re-presentation of the word pictures, of the swinging between poles and dimensions and of the shell itself, a simple replica of the death-life archetype, mother of all beings, non-self and self.

In recording together with the poet/reader, the viola improvisation signifies not only the words on the page but also the shaping of words to form, intentionality in response to object reality - carapace-object, subjectivity to imaginary world. This then is the 'between' or liminal place that improvisation offers: the potential to experience creativity.

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<sup>19</sup>Gwen Harwood's biographer, Alison Hoddinott (1991) speaks of this tension in Harwood's poems in *Gwen Harwood: The Real and the Imagined World* North Ryde: Angus & Robertson.

## risks

In some poems I used a freer form of improvisation where there is no skeleton to move from, merely a sense of space and time lived in tone and timbre at the moment of listening to the poet's reading. In this form I try to embody the poem's tone, imagery and theme, and reflect the poet's voice by deploying a sense of both freedom and confinement generated by the place the poem bespeaks. So a poem's subject may dictate a rising and falling, as in 'Dolphins' by Scott, where the phenomenon of leaping dolphins is represented through wide intervals and swinging bow-strokes. Improvisation in this instance was spontaneous and fully extemporised in response to the images, tone and moment of reading. I used violin rather than viola for this improvisation, as I wanted a brighter colouration and a more dramatic effect.

Another example of this risky kind of response is in the improvisations to Sarah Day's 'Alex Wanders', a poem written about a painting. Images of rainbows, cows grazing, galleries and studio coalesce into a canvas that evoked for me a journey between pictures of contrasting shapes. Before beginning I jotted down some intervals and bowing styles to spark a reaction in recording but when Day came to read the poem I took the more risky and spontaneous route, allowing the words and timbre of Day's voice to stimulate sonorities. On reflection, this improvisation seems to capture the stasis, subtlety and philosophical musings evoked by the poem's mood and imagery and to resonate to the 'insideness' of the gallery experience.

*Alex Wanders untitled oil board 31 cm x 20 cm*

*Gold evening slides obliquely down the side  
of a conical hill beneath a blue*

*and grey tin roof striated sky. The light  
and a lone cow bias the symmetry;*

*calm emanates as calm does from cows.  
The rest is accidental to the rainbow*

*from which the beast turns quietly away  
as if from an epiphany or*

*an aberration since the bow is slung  
inverted, mirroring the hill's curve, falling*

*away from an unknown hoof.  
What's hope inverted? tarot reversal*

*attests inherent opposites in all things -  
unhope an Anglo-Saxon might have said,*

*but not despair in that diaphanous pink  
and violet arc or in the unassuming*

*certitude, the easy angle of  
the neck that stoops to graze. Neither is this*

*a diabolic portent, hell bent,  
making luminous the underworld.*

*Humour embraces the anomaly  
wherein at the end of the day the hope*

*may lie. A dusky evening in a dim  
gallery on a sunny afternoon  
(from *Quickening* 1997: 28)*

towards emplacement

To return to process. Working with the poems, before recording the readings with improvisations, opened a door into the poets' worlds,



the spaces where becoming-poems emerged from emplacement. By tuning to the shifting images and moods, a marrying of sources occurred so that there was a deepening of images through the poets' inflection, rhythms and intonation and through the sonority of musical gesture. Bachelard expresses this intention saying that 'as the reader goes from one poem to the other, [s]he is made more dynamic by [her] reader's imagination'(1994: 66). Grafting layers was an intense, if imaginative, process, a novel way of knowing, both for poet and improviser. Poet W. H. Auden said: 'A verbal art like poetry is reflective; it stops to think. Music is immediate; it goes on to become' (1966: 3).

Improvising to (reflective) words swung wide a gateway of becoming, a deepening of belonging. If there was improvising for the poet in the enactment of this becoming, it was through subtle shifts in voice timbre, body language and listening to the music responding to the words.

### liminal space

In bringing together poetry and music I have tried to strip from my musical impulses the accumulations of music education so that intuitive response is central to the improvising gesture. There is irony here as it has been education which has formed the technique that has made improvisations in this form possible. (Were I not conditioned to Western musical training, what would my improvising gestures

embody and reflect? Would drumming or singing be 'natural'?<sup>20</sup>) There is contrast too, as poems, those finely figured flowerings of imagination, have become embedded in structure, style, tradition and form yet they spring from the same source as the sonorous image, the 'prethinking' or auditory concept of musical composition and mythopoesis. Poets read from their books of poems; improvisers play with ideas, intuition, sense of place, moment and image with some notes to stir memory here and there. If we were to leave ideas and poetry books aside and fall towards intuitive gesture together, where would our improvising have taken us? What refrains would we have evolved in the playful honouring of each other, at home in place but with only fragments rather than sedimented word-figurations and bits of melody?

putting it out there

Completing the CD recording provoked another stage in the process: exhibition. As the recording for the *Will the real please stand up...a travelogue* was only intended to be sold as a gallery 'souvenir' and for possible inclusion in ABC's *the Listening Room* broadcasts, I had not given much time to its packaging. For *improvisation-image-voice* however, I intended to make it available for sale at bookshops, libraries and for broadcast.

With the assistance of an experienced graphic designer, Gordon Harrison-Williams, I put together a package that reflected the

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<sup>20</sup>As Gablik says, '[r]itual, drumming, monotonous chanting, repetitive movements, are no longer an integral part of modern life, but they are a sure way to make a direct hit on this "dreaming" [visionary] aspect of the psyche' (1991: 47).

content. It took many hours to collate photographs and notes for the booklet, arrange copyright with publishers, liaise with the designer and printers and to write letters to radio producers, bookshops and libraries. As funding from the Arts Council of Tasmania had not been forthcoming due to the CD being part of a research project, I worked to a strict budget of School of English Research Grants and my own funds, and so could only prepare small batches of CDs until they were all sold.

Moving the CD into public space confronted me with its fallibility, not to mention my own. As a product that 'sold' improvisation and poetry, it came under the spotlight of 'perfection' that pervades the recording industry and Classical music traditions. However, while on reflection there may be one or two tracks that could have been discarded in the mixing process, overall, as an exploratory artefact, the CD achieves what it set out to do: to bring together into a new space two different genres to express the meaning of place for women artists, and to show that improvisation, as an act of response to and dialogue with poetry of place, can deepen the experience of listening and open up meaning.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>At the time of writing (November 1999) extracts from the CD have been played on ABC programs *New Music Australia* and *Melisma*. The CD will also be used on a *Poetica* program in 2000 which will be covering the 1999 Tasmanian Poetry Festival. There have been some sales through bookshops but most have been through personal orders generated by 'word-of-mouth'. In all, about 60 CDs have so far been distributed.

## **performance: bringing out the sounds of private soundings**

To conclude my reflections on creative work I want briefly to investigate performance in public space which, while by choice has not been central to this thesis, has been an aspect of my work that has emerged concurrently with its writing and so has effected its shaping.

Improvisation, incidental in my performances with folk bands, *a cappella* groups and choirs over many years has now become generative to any performance in which I am collaborating with spoken word performers. I have already written about the aspects of improvised-composition to a structured poem in my analysis of my recorded works for this thesis but I have not voiced the process whereby *both* poet and musician intentionally improvise with words and sound in the moment of collaborative performance; when a poem continues to find shape and resonance in performance along with the emerging sounds.

Where a performance of an improvised-composition to a formal poem may generate subtle momentarily shifts in the reading by the poet at the time of performance in response to the musical gestures, these shifts are not language-based but corporeal responses to the moment and space of interaction. In a performance though, where both poet and musician set out with some structured material but choose to play and inter-play with all the elements of pitch, rhythm, dynamic, language and meaning so that a perpetual state of non-

closure and process-in-action is evoked, the result is totally unpredictable, and, for me, a spiritual event: the space of the sacred.

I am fascinated with word-play and through my performances with the spoken-word artist/poet Sue Moss have been able to explore this field as well as pushing the boundaries of voice and string sounds.

Performance of this genre requires a willingness on the part of the poet to see the prepared poem or narrative as an ever-becoming text, so that in performance, with the interaction of the other performer in 'call and response', a new 'intertext' emerges.

## experimental process

In June 1999, Moss and I used a new poem ('Space') and fragments of other poems as the skeletal structure for a twenty-minute improvised piece for live broadcast.<sup>22</sup> What began as fixed texts became contours on which to re-locate deferred meaning through momentarily extemporisation. From one rehearsal to the next we never knew which words would be cut or extended, sung or spoken, whether phrases or syllables would be emphasised or what pattern of interaction between sound gestures and words would devolve. Over several weeks of rehearsal we moved from a set of Moss's poems and my prefigured sound gestures to a form of improvisation that was like a sky-scape theatre, as we shunted meaning and denied closure on the material. Each word and phrase became a site for substitution and contiguity, both sonically and linguistically. At the outset of the

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<sup>22</sup>The broadcast was a semi-final for the ABC *Improvisatory Music Awards* 1999. See attached cassette.

process we felt so constrained by the poems and our enforced intimacy that we could improvise for no more than five minutes; as the performance event approached we became more and more liberated into metamorphosis. The poems and sound-gestures became springboards for the weaving of syllable and sound and the intertext synonymous for the growing collaboration.

'Space', originally a song written by Moss for performance with a folk singer, was appropriated as a skeleton for extemporisation and the words spell out the sense of hybrid space that the performances generated:

### *Space*

*We meet in the space  
The space between you and me  
Between the earth , between the sky  
Lives a possibility*

*In the space. In the space  
We don't know where we are  
Stepping from the here to there  
We could fall between the stars*

*Between, between, between  
We are the space between  
The space is where it happens  
Beyond our wildest dreams*

*In the space, in the space,  
We don't know where we are  
Stepping from the here to there  
Borders are sabotaged*

*It's the space between an idea  
The space between a song  
The space between each night and day  
We know as dusk and dawn*

*It's a naming & un-naming  
Both a circle and an edge  
Words dissolve, the world unfurls  
Both beginning & an end  
(1999).*

## between and becoming

Much of Moss's work explores between and becoming states and sites. Her poems prompt the reader/listener to ask questions beyond sameness and difference towards diversity and non-teleological presuppositions. The space where we 'become' is the deep well of mythopoesis, the home-hearth, womb, phenomenal self enriched through sharing with another but never rigid in stasis.

Drawing on images from the French performance artist, Orlan, the theatre piece 'Speech Acts Under A Cosmetic Surgeon's Scalpel' confronts the bleak territory of binary opposition which patriarchy forces women to inhabit, denying them the choice to generate their own mode of being in which they feel 'at home'. Moss (reading Orlan) renders instead a body that is new, emerging and intertextual, resisting the standards of unblemished youth set by patriarchal stereotypes and exemplified by plastic surgery and the fashion industry:

### *Speech Acts Under A Cosmetic Surgeon's Scalpel*

*Here is my face shaped like a promise.  
I am utterance beneath the scalpel,  
redeeming old silences & talking you through  
your deliberate act of effacement...  
The mask flapped back reveals emptiness; sinew, skin,  
and suction's incessant hiss.*

*I am the space where meaning is lost.  
 Hear my voice, an unfaltering ostinato  
 beneath staunch seepage.  
 This meld of blood & word disturbs  
 your masterful silence, my tongue  
 refuses to rest mute & suppressed.  
 A voice exists. Know that I wait  
 watchful, renewed & will scream  
 to disclaim any false move.  
 (1998)*

Orlan's performance is a defiant act yet at the same time a collaborative improvisation between her invited medical staff, film crew, and herself. The script, parodied as she reads excerpts of theoretical texts during the operation, unfurls in the moment, like the skin as it pares away from behind the ear, beneath the lip. Who is this woman, what is this body, this disembodied voice, this gender? She recreates herself as she directs others to deconstruct her face, the signature-self. No-one can feel comfortable with such de-facement, with a woman taking the power to herself for her un-doing and re-doing, just as she wants to be, for now, in this evolving landscape-of-self.

Similarly, in 'His Breasts', Moss recreates the cultural en-gender-ing of vulnerable humanness:

*His Breasts*

*Waking I find him beside me  
 fragment limbs loose with warmth and sleep.  
 His hands sketch my body's tracery  
 before a question breaks each breath's deep  
 intake: "Can you accept me as a woman?"  
 His eyes are wary, his senses honed  
 to my response of fear and shock...*

*I stumble on his breast part-veiled by hair*



*lost in a slip and spin of air.  
 Who will feast at the borderland of his hips,  
 be first to taste the melding of his lips?  
 Some make a greater pattern and design  
 from the guises we are given, a shifting terrain  
 that struggling tongues fail to explain.  
 We meet in the space between, unconfined  
 by the sliding zone of skin and sighing.  
 His breasts the shape of a different desiring.  
 (unpublished 1999)*

Moss uses the double Pushkin sonnet form here as a foil for the territory she explores: again, the improvised self, a becoming-self that defies Western culture's rigid binary oppositions. There is a sense too of partnership, of a moving towards and then away from a prescriptive gender-type. In some space, in an ideal world, we might understand each other, polarities shed in a new non-dichotomous landscape.

## trials

As Orlan's performances have demonstrated, to be willing to unmake oneself publicly in order to remake oneself is to be prey to misunderstanding, to ridicule and to possible failure. Sue Moss and I can attest to this from recent performance experience. Although our performances have nothing of the physical risks and interventions Orlan encounters, we have received criticism for attempting collaborative sound/word improvisations that have no generic model, and we encounter something akin to disregard by many men and women who choose to find little point of contact in the skin we cut and paste. As Moss often says, 'it challenges their Mozartian comfort zones', and clearly the performances are unsettling to the point of

pushing participants into a spectrum of responses. There are moments of 'beautiful sound', but not enough for the audience to be completely immersed. There is word-play, but not sufficient for uproarious comedy and there's story but it's too loose and fractured for plot and closure. This style of collaboration is between genre descriptions and it becomes its organic self in the moment of creation, even though the use of prefigured structures is essential to production. As Moss observes, it was not until she began to improvise with her poems that she realised the breadth of meaning open to her. Similarly, if I remain fixed within the Classical expectations of viola playing and singing, my improvisations quickly become clichéd with little resonance to the changing shape of the meanings in the word-play or to my feelings and thoughts in the moment of experiencing. While I want a skeletal shape to work from I do not want to be emplaced in its flesh and bones. So performativity, the making of markers for self-description, joins performance through corporeality.<sup>23</sup> Lived experience comes to - and becomes in - the theatre, as the speaking, moving, singing, playing subject breaks with prior contexts in the process of resignifying languages and texts/contexts. As Judith Butler observes:

*We do things with language, produce effects with language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is the name for our doing: both "what" we do (the name for the action that we*

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<sup>23</sup>As Judith Butler suggests: 'The name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a scene of agency from ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call. To take up the name that one is called is no simple submission to prior authority, for the name is already unmoored from prior context, and entered into the labour of self-definition. The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of operation. Such a redeployment means speaking words without prior authorisation and putting into risk the security of linguistic life, the sense of one's place in language as it calls into question the linguistic survival of the one addressed. Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change' (Butler 1997: 163).

*characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences* (1997: 8).

Naming - actions, objects, concepts, thoughts - becomes a transformative process during collaborative improvisation. We unhinge the door to meaning, understanding incrementally that each moment in the process breaks up language still more until we begin to build an interface unscripted by our own or others' expectations and histories. And it is iterativity that assists the process: repeating phrases, words and gestures opens a space for change, for deepened, shifting responses that brings the *habitus* into the performativity of performance. As our improvisations evolved in resonating inter-activity, Moss and I intuitively sought out repetition and found that the subtlety of timbre changes led to shifts for the creative imagination. Repeating fragments pre-empt new refrains and beckon the audience to stay committed to listening for slippages.

## theatre of experience

As Hélène Cixous reminds us, the theatre provides a way to explore and create the space between the 'I' and the other, where we rewrite the 'ancient and eternal truths' through a 'new image' and 'a new way of saying':

*Such is the room for manoeuvre in which the differential of genres is inscribed: a between where what's at stake is reaching the limits, playing with them, establishing passages. The writing works at measuring relationships: at grasping the point where the miniscule difference makes a great separation; where meaning goes backwards, where the human becomes non-human; where the extremes of major-minor, masculine-feminine, prose-poem touch each other, have a reciprocal need, form the two*

*moments (forces, movements) of a dynamic...[rather than] a hierarchy of genres (1997: 152).*

For Cixous, 'changing genres' enables her to bring together poetry and politics, to speak against violence and marginalisation. Sue Moss's turn to theatre reflects this same intention to use a medium of expression where the poems can be acted out, lived through the performing body as it is in 'everyday' experience, so that the 'I' is physically present, punctuating the text with humour and irony to render the re-presentation into more than a closed political text. Collaboration like this subverts the generic artefact: it is a summoning of intertextuality, a deconstruction of fixtures and a re-inventing of textures in which the force of thinking while doing is being-woman.

## conclusion

In bringing this thesis-in-process to a point of closure, the metaphor of a musical rest is appropriate. A rest to the musicologist denotes a fixed time-break in a formalist code but it can also be interpreted as a lull in relation to the whole that is forever in process. A rest can precipitate an echo of the sounds already heard and/or generate a cacophony that is becoming-new. So rather than a crashing cadential chord here I like to think of these closing remarks as a resting place, a zone of transition and possibility for transformation in the *palim-plus*.

I have sought to respond to the resonances of being-in-the-world (outside) while at the same time trying to uncover the languages of that world as they impact on women's lives, resound in cultural myths and find tenor in the music of women composers and in my improvisations. Improvisatory practice has interpellated into the scheme of things because its impulses are redolent of the patterns of the non-human world and because these impulses frequently voice momentarily apprehensions of that world in the lived experience and creative expression of women composers.

A major concern of this project has been to write from a feminist perspective while engaging with and reflecting on lived experience, and so I have sought to engage with my own process as much as with the journeys of the composers I interviewed. The overall result has been a gathering of ideas, readings, sounds, textures and metaphors that resonate to outside-place and improvisation and to that most pivotal of all resonances: being-in-the-world, at home.

In all this my argument has been that the history of feminisation of the land has been depletive for both the land and women. If the mythologies of the feminine in the land are useful at all it is for reinventing a sonority that affirms women's subjectivity through participation with the land in partnerships of reciprocity and belonging, not by perpetuating denigrating alterity and power through ownership. This new space of the feminine will be one that is becoming rather than fixed in essentialism, and it will speak from desire that is straight from the lived experience of place for women rather than from discourses rooted in masculinist desire and closure. As Elizabeth Grosz says, desire for women is understood in terms of 'surfaces and intensities' - becoming which mutates into a new space of deepening and opening.

In the first 'sounding', I presented outside space through the globe of the common terms 'nature', 'landscape' and 'wilderness'. By discovering emplacement, which for women may be an embodied sense of the past and present in place - the *habitus* - experience can be infused with a sense of the sacred and with interrelatedness and change. This sense of place, reminiscent but not appropriating of Aboriginal 'indwelling' of place, comes through participation and community rather than through detachment and disinterested representation.

In the second 'sounding' I tried to show that improvisatory practice, by its playfulness, intuition and embodiment of music-in-process, is a way by which women can express a sense of the sacred-in-place as well as the diversity that is the lived experience of being-

in-the-world. While structured models of improvisation have provided tools for some women to do this, non-idiomatic improvisatory practices open a fresh space in which old and new can mutate through gestures derived from 'serious' music *and* from the free flow of ideas.

The diversity and multiplicity of musics of women composers in Australia in recent years is revealed in the variety of styles and forms, in the broad use of signifiers of the natural world and in the application of many different improvisatory practices. From the formalist works of Miriam Hyde and Anne Boyd to the political pieces of Moya Henderson, through to the intertextual experiments of Ros Bandt and Hazel Smith, women composers voice sonorities of place and being-in-the-world. I have demonstrated in the third 'sounding', from examples by these composers, that improvisatory gestures have often been deployed to sound place, even when not 'told' in musicological terms. It is these improvisatory gestures which I believe act as channels of desire and expression of a multiplicity of impulses in-the-moment.

The recordings included with this thesis are examples from my own oeuvre. As I describe in 'sounding four', in the installations for *Will the real please stand up...a travelogue* I have attempted to create a sense of movement and transmutation from an awareness of outside space to a deep quietening through resonance with the process of being-in-place, stillness and listening. In *improvisation-image-voice* the space between word and sound has been configured as an intertext where refined linguistic texts mutate with improvised musical motifs that draw on many musical ideas. These recordings

demonstrate that improvisation is a continuum of impulses from the most spontaneous to a re-configuration of cells or 'applied' adjustments in the studio.

In the closing musings, 'Performance: bringing out the sounds of private soundings', I mull over the 'live' experience of performance in which words and sounds move together in an amoebic space. Here poem and compositional motif shift and realign in mutual recognition of and stimulation by each other. In creating these mutations, the poet joins the musician in playful deconstruction and re-invention of her text and the musician responds and re-creates with word as well as sound gestures.

A postmodern intertextual thesis that sets out to be interdisciplinary and phenomenological represents being-in-the-world by figuring a cacophony of cultural phenomena and the 'I' in the world as it reflects upon those phenomena. While I have attempted to show that a 'space between' for women is one of reciprocity and openness, I have also sought to affirm that being-in-the-world for women is different from what it is for men and so women's lived experience cannot be defined only in generic terms. Like intertextuality itself, this space between in which creativity is generated may be androgynous, potentially diverse and pregnant with possibility but it is sung into being by the female sexed body and feminine desire that springs from the deep well of becoming that is the lived experience of being woman-in-the-world.



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**appendix**

## letter to composers

April 15, 1998

Dear ...

As I am currently looking at women composers in Australia who use Nature as a major source of material, I am writing to ask whether I might contact you either by phone, or email, or by arranging to meet to discuss the ways your compositions have been informed by the natural world. I am aware that time is a constraint for us all but would appreciate the opportunity to meet if possible or give you the opportunity to answer some written questions which can be returned by mail or email. I will be in Sydney between May 27 and June 7 and in Melbourne for a few days following if those centres happen to concur with your travels. The questions below are designed to lead you into descriptions of your landscape-inspired work or you can answer them more directly if you wish.

As a composer using such metaphors myself, you may be interested in some background details. I am largely self-taught as a composer, though I did study composition with Don Kay and performance (viola/violin) at the Tasmanian Conservatorium and in Melbourne with Stella Nemet and Brisbane with Elizabeth Morgan. In 1996 I collaborated with three other women to produce an exhibition around the theme of women and the land (Will the real Australia please stand up...a travelogue). The ABC Listening Room bought the broadcast rights to my contributing installations and the artefacts from them (score, recordings, photos, catalogue) were installed in the foyer of the Women's Music Festival in Sydney in 1997. I have improvised with poets in performance and I am currently recording improvisations to four Tasmanian poets (Gwen Harwood, Margaret Scott, Sarah Day and Angela Rockel) for whom landscape is central. Alongside this I am also recording an extended improvisation as a response to the current ecological crises of Jabiluka and Old Forests in Tasmania. I am particularly interested in the intertextual space and moment between word and sound, especially improvised sound, and the ways in which all composition emerges from improvised moments to a concept captured in notation or on recording. Working with sounds from the natural world as well as with instrumental and voice improvisations to 'landscape' poetry is contributing to an understanding of this process. A major focus of my research, based partly on personal experience of composing, is the impact of issues surrounding gender on women composers, their improvisations and land themes in their compositions.

I am aware that conceptualising these images that inform our soundscapes can be difficult largely because as women we respond intuitively and spiritually to those images. As this is the area that is of profound importance to this subject - the connection between women and land in a mythopoetic

(archetypal or spiritual) sense - I would value any personal comments you can make on this association as well as any other details which may apply to the representation of the land in your work.

The following questions/pointers might be useful as starting points or they could be answered directly if that is easier:

1. Has a specific piece of land generated an idea behind a particular piece of music and if so, why?
2. Is there a general theme of land in your work? If so, what kind of landscape is it, why does it inform your work and how is it demonstrated in particular pieces?
3. If landscape is a recurring theme in your work, do you use recurring motifs, modalities, instruments, textures to signify these themes? How do you do this? If not, how do these elements change and recreate the images central to your work?
4. How does the land hold deeper, that is 'spiritual', meanings for you in ways that have been central to your compositions? This might mean an identification with Indigenous themes perhaps or silence as metaphor for meditation and contemplation of the land and its elements. Or perhaps a sense of Creator/God has shaped some of your work?
5. Have there been written texts such as poems, stories or myths about the land that have shaped your compositions? How have you used these?
6. Is there an element of improvisation in your work that the land informs? If so, how have you explored this method of composing in ways which resonate with an experience of the land?
7. Are there any pieces where you have consciously taken a feminist stance by using the land as a metaphor which debunks the patriarchal concept of God (say as in hymns to a female God) or as a reaction to the colonial representation of the land-as-female?

Thank you for your cooperation. Please find enclosed a self addressed envelope if you wish to reply to the questions by mail. I will make contact by phone or email in the next two weeks, if I have not heard from you by then, to discuss possible arrangements.

andrea J. breen  
University of Tasmania

## specific questions returned to Hazel Smith

Hazel, I am particularly interested in how gestures emerge for you in moments of improvisation and how those gestures speak for your womanality and emplacement in the moment and then deepen over time. I'll attempt to be more specific. In your article *Beyond Poetry* (Island, Winter 1996) you mention the significance of improvisation to you as a poet (particularly in performance), the difficulty of improvising words, and that you have strategies for improvising other than the multi-tracking techniques that studio time and technology gives you. Could you describe those other strategies?

On a more practical level, how does improvisation 'happen' with Roger Dean and on your own? How do you understand the collaboration in terms of improvisatory impulses? Is the inter-play of collaboration essential to the improvisatory process or is practising, or recording samples, alone more important beforehand? Perhaps it is a synthesis of these things?

In *Beyond Poetry* you mention that the training as a violinist has 'opened up opportunities for technical appropriation of musical techniques'. It is clear that you intertextualise rhythmic structures and use random and structured rhythms to fracture constructions. How does the word-play and linear narrative of your language work relate to other elements of musicality: to sonority, to timbre, phrasing, tonality, extemporisation or through-composition? What role does improvisation play in appropriating musical languages to speech?

In *The Riting of the Runder* and *Nuraghic Echoes* for example, you play with language, invented language, voice, narrative and key words from English that circulate through the material you are uncovering - the position of women in patriarchal culture, to use a broad description. You based *Nuraghic Echoes* on a lost civilisation of Sardinia, on three women in three places and eras so that, amongst other things, a shifting of subjectivity and identity was created; whereas *The Riting of the Runda* explores, through new language, the fluid identity of one woman in flight. To me it appears that you are playing with the *between* spaces of being: the moveable between gender, space, and time;

between music and words, recording and performance, self and other, violinist and poet, embodied voice and disembodied voice. Could you extend this observation with your own thoughts on the process of creativity?

How much of this language play is structured and how, to use phenomenological terms, did those phenomena come to be apprehended? What I am trying to get at here is the intentionality of improvisation behind the language forming. How did the new language begin? What imaginal space does it represent? In a sense the new language is, to use Deleuze and Guattari's system, a becoming-language. It is from the depths of your experience, being and self in the world and 'becomes' (Hazel Smith as a phenomenon, language as an art form) as it is spoken/written.

#### Emplacement:

There is a sense of place in your work, and of transition of selves, a sense of journeying in space and time, especially in *Nuraghic Echoes*. From the Lithuania of your childhood to here and now. Speaking from your sense of feminality, how has place been integrated into, or become central to, your improvised compositions? Even the studio space would hold some meaning in terms of coming together, of 'radiant' transformation of sound gestures and text and of accessibility to women: a space not free of gendered history, a spatial representation of what you are trying to say in the text perhaps?

And following on from those gender issues of emplacement, what is your sense of your work from a feminist perspective? How have feminisms informed both the choice of material, the structures and the improvisations? You mention the 'push-and-pull' effect of the syncopated rhythms in your earlier pieces as representing the struggle within binary oppositions and the changing timbre of voice as a 'cross-dressing' equivalent. Without being too probing, how has your personal experience as a woman affected your creativity and need to express it in feminist ways?

#### Spirituality:

Listening to your work I am taken to other places, to a deeper sense of my self and being. This comes I think through a merging of emotional triggers, place references, sonority and fluctuations. The title 'Beyond Poetry', with its multiple meanings, can signify the 'more' of the

numinous or the inner self. For me spirituality is aligned to layers of meaning and revisiting sites in myself (and in the real world) that can be deepened through other artists experiences. Music and the musicality of speech has a potential for spirituality too, and it could be argued that there is an implicit sense of the sacred in the awakening that musical moments generate. Did you have a spiritual intention with any of your works and if so can you describe what they might have been? Or perhaps when you revisit your compositions, either in performance or listening, they become resacralised through process and perhaps take on archetypal intensity?

# Will the real Australia please stand up ... a travelogue



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Cath Barcan • Julie Hunt  
Andrea Breen • Sue Moss

Curator: Christl Berg

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an installation by Cath Barcan, Julie  
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Saltbush Scratch  
The Unsilent Silence  
Head Thrum  
Stone Curlew's Cry  
Tattered Clothing  
Palm Sweep  
Starburst  
Aloneness  
The Untold Story  
Mulga Sparks

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1

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2

Mice

3

Locusts

4

Sheep

5

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6

Campervans

7

Bush poets

8

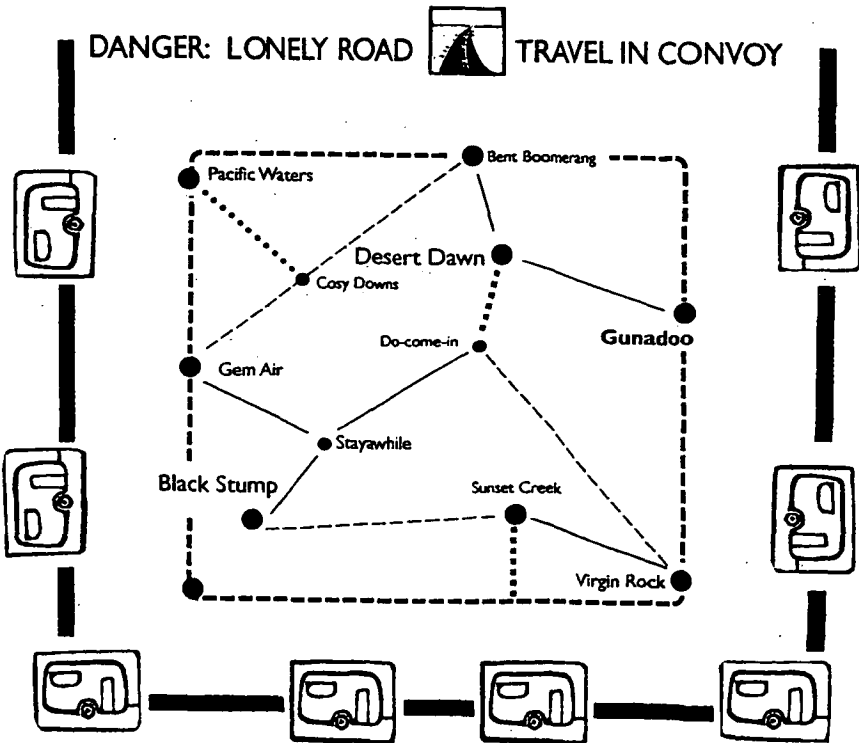
C & W singers

BEWARE



ULULATING  
LIZARD

grandeur monolith horizon earth wild prehistoric wilderness towering sand land(scape) tens of thousands of years desert natural wonder awe inspiring holiday experience lifetime beauty scenic wonder vast never ending spectacular soaring sheer face flora ancient remarkable dramatic eons information lookout picnic walking fireplace magnificent sandstone escarpments rich wildlife floodplains tidal regions crocodiles exciting two hour cruise birdlife natural features ancient rock walls ablaze in brilliant colour enjoy a short walk waterhole stunning earth colours spectacular unique wilderness retreat remote terrain fascination chain of salt lakes enjoy pre dinner drinks and capture the charming colours the sun sets low over desert dunes summit sunrise giant salt pans magnificent views visit the rate insight afternoon corroboree waterfall cascades escarpment lush rain forest natural universal values anthills damper wander amidst the stand on the then to the heart of the brilliant magnetic tiny scattered settlements original artefacts sun dust lichen canyon gaze conglomerate domes drinks outback by moonlight even escorted climb return flight home display pools myriad sandstone walls stone arches ghost bat experience walk-through pig-nosed turtles magpie geese jabirus award-winning fascination expert guide picturesque relaxing native shaggy ecosystem colour stone stunning spinifex unforgettable grandeur spellbinding very mystical expert guide mineral springs delicious travel to the tranquil area unusual magnetic termite mounds idyllic waterfalls and a delicious picnic lunch stop rainforest crocodile-inhabited rivers an excellent display of local sun sets over the p star mountains gorges water-courses and plateau venture rugged overnight accom encounter water broilgas basking on a bank big croc! weather tree set in wild and beautiful outback member continuing north crossing on bizar re glow eerie surround long accommo- dation replica onal sightseeing tour own exper vervation leisure secrets intriguing night venturer complex eating new wanderer explore dramatic eons wonder vast new le dramatic eons information loc ants rich wildlife





It's not the stone they want  
it's the light inside the stone.  
Blue fire. Red ocean.  
Map of the inland flood plain.



site | seer



(Seeing is believing)



"God put the rock there for us  
all to enjoy."  
Young Christian tourist.

At the rock they can't wait to  
swarm up. "I promised my Dad,"  
the young Yank gasps.

At dusk it's paté & champagne,  
toast to shadows.  
Iron oxide hits the air.  
The rocks turns rust.

Interior eerie legend dawn ancient  
unknowable beyond words mystique  
timeless dreamtime heart centre beauty  
rock land sacred magic mysterious ceremony  
ceremoney marvel primitive forever deadcentre  
redcentre redheart awesome presence land rock  
silence rock sand secrets vast desert  
winds speaking unspeaking sacred  
timeless secrets sands unchanging  
sublime spiritual land place of wonder  
power & truth marvelous interior legend dawn dusk  
ancient unknowable beyond words mystique timeless  
dreamtime centre sacred primitive deadcentre  
redcentre redheart awesome inscrutable silence rock  
desert rock unspeaking rock secrets sacred rock  
ceremony public secret unique land unchanged  
elemental sublime spirit spell-binding wondrous place